

Teniwoha's novel for his Schoolgirl Detective Series, "**The Schoolgirl Detective and Eccentric Author – Night Before The Murder Case at the Mansion of Antiquarian Books,**" acts as a prequel to the first song in the series, "Murder Case at the Mansion of Antiquarian Books," and follows the events between the schoolgirl detective who loves mystery novels, Hanamoto Hibari, and the extremely sadistic mystery novel writer, Kudou Renma.

The first part in this three-part novel is called: *Suicide Case at Akebi High Rooftop*.

*"As the high school is busy with preparations for the Culture Festival, a female student is found on the roof, collapsed and bleeding.
Written in blood is a single "X." Is this an accident? Or a case? Hibari sets out to uncover the truth."*

This part is further divided into three chapters, so here's the first one! Masterpost with links to all the translated chapters can be found [here](#).

| [Pt.1, Ch.2 \(first half\)→](#)

* If you can, I highly encourage supporting the creators by buying the book for yourself at [Amazon!](#) (also, I most likely won't be scanning the illustrations, so if you'd like to see them, there's another reason to buy it)

—
—Now then, please excuse me, but I'll be heading up for a bit.

Chapter One: Let Me Go Make You Some Coffee

The first Monday of May. An early morning.

Because I had something in particular to take care of, I was carrying a canvas and art supplies under my arm up to the roof.

I had a feeling that I would be able to paint a nice picture from up there.

I had already decided on my model, right from the very beginning.

However, because I knew that that person would never agree to be my model even if I asked them to, I had no



choice but to rely on memory and just let the brush take its course. It was a sad thing to do, but this way, I could paint anywhere I wanted to. And wouldn't it be nice to paint up on the roof for a change of pace?

And so with that logic, I, Hanamoto Hibari, was heading up the stairs of the school building. Since I'd woken up especially early for this, I wanted to use my time efficiently.

It was 5:30 in the morning. There could be no morning earlier than this. And with that thought, I yawned.

It was my first time coming to school this early, so I was a little nervous. Although still able to yawn.

In front of the gates, the old janitor had been silently doing morning radio exercises, but all the way up, I hadn't passed by a single student.

On the stair landing, there were a ridiculous number of handmade posters pasted all around.

Drama Club. Wind Orchestra Club. Photography Club. Tea Ceremony Club. Debate. Judo. Kendo. Archery.

Other this and that's. An endless number of this and that's.

And on every simple poster, there were the words "Akebi Festival" stamped on them.

Before I explain what the Akebi Festival is, let me give a brief explanation about the school I attend.

Akebi Private High School. It was founded 40 years ago. The student population consists of both males and female, coming out to be about 800 students. Including clubs, there are many extracurricular activities; even I don't know how many there are exactly. By the way, I'm in the Art Club. Our school motto is "diligence, friendship, and passion." To represent the meaning of those three words, the school flag is decorated with silver, gold, and scarlet leaves.

And now, finally, the Akebi Festival is what everyone commonly calls the culture festival that takes place at Akebi High every year in May.

During the period leading up to the festival, the battle of appeal between each individual club at school reaches its peak. Basically, it's a territory battle with posters.

Also, each club has to come up with their own project for the festival, and the fact that everyone just advertises in every which way shows how completely unregulated it is within the school.

Ever since it was founded, my school runs on high school spirit. And since it can't be controlled once everyone's all fired up, even the school faculty have stopped trying to restrain the students.

It seems the topic of suppressing the excessive activities and freedom of expression has been debated throughout the school for many years.

Nimble, I stepped over some equipment and spare chairs piled up in the middle of the stairs.

"I'll paint it real nice in a fresh.... environment!"

I threw open the door to the roof excitedly and was met with a cool wind on my cheeks.

It was still chilly this early in the morning.

For the Akebi Festival, each member of the Art Club had decided to exhibit at least one work. However, I had yet to submit even a single one.

The reason for that was because my model had been uncooperative, but my lack of artistic skill also played a big part in it.

With that in mind, it might've been a bit naïve of me to come up to the roof, thinking that a change of pace would solve things.

It was cold.

I squinted my eyes up at the brand-new sky, brought in by the sunrise just moments before.

"Achoo!"

I sneezed.

Maybe I ought to go back to the room, after all. As I thought this, I lowered my gaze to ground level.

And there—

".....Eh?"

In the center of the roof, a female student had collapsed on the dull, grey concrete.

Unconsciously, I dropped my canvas.

Blood. There was a pool of blood on the ground.

Spreading out from her head as the center—

It had to be only my imagination that her arms were bent in the wrong direction.

The female student was wearing only one slipper. No, only one slipper had come off. Her other shoe lay on the ground quite a distance from her.

It was a subtle detail.

Once I'd thought of it this way, I couldn't see it any other way.

I looked up. I did exactly that, looking up directly above the collapsed student.

".....Did she fall?"

Other than the sky that was slowly turning blue, there was nothing else there.

But still, she had fallen.

Straight down from the sky.

"Saho!"

As I rushed forward, I called out the name of my friend.

That day after school, I was called to the Guidance Office. The reason, of course, was because of the female student who had collapsed on the roof.

There, my homeroom teacher, Kurotani, and the school principal were waiting, and both of them said to me, "Don't talk to anyone else about what happened with Amemura."

Amemura Saho.

A quiet girl with good grades, a model honor student, and part of the Gardening Club.

She's a second year like me, and although we're in different classes, we're friends. There have been times when we've eaten lunch up on the roof with our mutual friends together. Maybe I couldn't call her my closest friend, but she's still my friend. At the very least, that's what I believe.

And that very same Saho had come falling from the sky.

When I'd found her, Saho had still been breathing, fortunately. I immediately ran to the night watchman's room, explained the situation, and they had called the doctor.

After about thirty minutes, I saw a black Crown car come in through the rear gate. And from it, an elderly doctor slowly stepped out, and began to make his way up to the roof, gasping for breath the entire time. A male student with strong-looking arms followed after as an assistant.

By the time I was watching them take Saho to the hospital, many other students were already beginning to come on campus.

The roof was immediately blocked off, and although I had only seen some of the teachers on the scene, there was still a bit of commotion at school after that.

Because of this, I wasn't able to concentrate on any of my morning or afternoon classes.

"Hey, Hibari-san, you were the first one to find her right? Was there a lot of blood? Like a sea of blood? Well—?"

At first, I was annoyed by my classmates' insensitive questions, but I soon grew tired of them, and decided to avoid them altogether. But even avoiding them was a bone-breaking task.

No, the one with the broken bones here was Saho.

It seemed that she still hadn't regained consciousness.

I'd heard that rather than the blood loss, the bruises on her entire body were more severe, and she had bone fractures in more than just a couple places.

But when I was told that her life wasn't in danger even in spite of all that, I heaved a sigh of relief right there in the Guidance Office.

"Listen, don't casually go around and talk about what happened this morning. That'll only needlessly upset the other students."

I was pressured even more to leave.

After saying, "Please excuse me," I left the Guidance Office. Although I didn't remember doing anything that required being excused for.

As I tottered down the hallway, I tried to think of why the teachers were so insistent on keeping quiet about this incident.

It had to be because of those words—

There could be no other reason. It had been clearly written on Kurotani and the principal's faces.

The teachers were very concerned about the message that Saho had left behind.

Yes, the message—

Saho had to have been the one that left it.

Just two dark red, warped words—

Written in blood.

“It’s X,” was what it had said.

What could be the meaning behind those words?

“X..... Ex.....?”

From what Saho’s parents had said at the hospital, she had been studying at home as usual the previous Sunday, and eaten dinner with the rest of the family as she always did. She hadn’t said much that day, but since she didn’t have a very bright and lively personality to begin with, they hadn’t thought much of it.

Also, she had told her mother that she was going to school early the next day to prepare for the Akebi Festival, and gone to bed early. By the time her mother had woken up the next morning, Saho had already left the house.

But, had she actually left that early in morning to do preparations?

As I thought about this, I neared the stairs.

“Hibari-chan, good work today,”

I heard my name called, and looked up to see a female student standing on the stair landing. It was a fair-skinned girl with delicate-looking eyes.

“Yue-chan! I’m back—!”

I ran up the stairs and jumped into her arms.

The girl that had the appearance of a Japanese doll caught me with a troubled smile.

Mizorogi Yue. She’s the daughter of a good family from the neighboring prefecture, and ever since the very first day of school, we’ve gotten along well. She must have been waiting for me, worried about how I’d suddenly been called away by the teachers after school.

“Here’s your bag,”

I was touched that she had gone and brought my bag from the classroom for me. I felt my heart swell at all the kindness she had shown me today.

“This, too. You’re going to bring it home with you today to paint on, right?”

She had even brought my canvas, which was still completely blank.

“Yue-chan, if I’m ever reborn as a boy, please marry me,”

I joked with all my might.

“Hmm. Mizorogi Hibari doesn’t have such a bad ring to it.”

“So I’m marrying into *your* family?”

As always, she made a gentle, yet sharp counterattack. I think of this as another one of her charms.

Sunlight streamed in through the window on the landing.

From far away, we could hear the melody that the Wind Orchestra Club was playing. We made comments like, “What was the title of this song again?” and “I like the sound of clarinets,” as we walked to the entrance together.

“Oh?”

Yue suddenly looked ahead of us. I followed her gaze. Standing against the shoe cupboards was a tall, male student.

“Oh, hello,”

He said with a face that indicated he’d only just noticed us.

“Are you Ms. Hanamoto Hibari?”

“Umm...”

I found myself at a loss for words.

Did I know him?

I couldn’t remember.

“I’m Igarashi Yuuma, a third year. It’s nice to meet you.”

I’m sure there must have been question marks in my eyes. He seemed to have noticed this, and quickly introduced himself.

After hearing his name, Yue seemed to recognize him,

“It’s Igarashi-senpai, the president of the Akebi Festival Executive Committee.”

He had somewhat light hair, and square glasses. His demeanor was calm, just like his appearance.

“I see. The president of the Executive Committee, hm? How may I help me? Wait a minute... Have I done something to interfere with the committee’s duties duties!?”

I wavered at the end of my sentence, but Yue stood up to my defense.

“Senpai, you’re so terrible! This girl is completely vulnerable after being stepped on and kicked around since this morning. Just look at her! Right now, she’s like a slug that’s had salt sprinkled on it! And yet you still have the heart to blame her!?”

“Slug.....”

I didn’t think I looked *that* bad.

“Please, calm down. You haven’t done anything to interfere. I just wanted to ask something about the incident from this morning. About... that student you found on the roof—what happened to her? The teachers won’t tell us anything..... It’s not like I’m trying to pry or anything. It’s just, because of my position.... you know?”

“You’re worried about what impact it might have on the Akebi Festival, right?”

“That’s very perceptive of you.”

"If that's the case, I don't think there's going to be any problems. From what I heard, she seemed fine, and should recover normally."

I figured it was safe to say this much.

"I see..... Thank you. Another member on the committee has been worrying constantly since this morning, as well. I'm really glad she's alright,"

After saying this, Igarashi-senpai removed his glasses and rubbed his eyes a couple times. I noticed that there was a white handkerchief wrapped around his left hand, but what caught my attention more was the redness of his eyes.

For a second, I thought he'd been so overcome with emotion from the news that he'd started crying, but that wasn't the case. It seemed that he was just lacking a bit of sleep.

"I stayed up late checking the schedule for the day of the festival while listening to the radio."

"Radio? You mean S-Edition Hour?"

S-Edition Hour. A radio program that was on air late Sunday nights.

"Yeah. As usual, they were playing songs by artists like Presley and Dinah Shore,"

Igarashi-senpai said while smoothing down his hair with both hands.

"I listen to it often, too. I always fall asleep when it gets too late, though,"

I raised up both of my hands cheerfully.

Maybe because my father has always played records, I've loved to listen and sing songs since I was young.

Even though you're not very good at it, I like your singing, Hibari-chan! Even though you're not good!

That was the honest assessment of the friend who stood beside me, Yue.

"Senpai! So this is where you've been wasting time?"

It was then that a female student with a bobbed haircut appeared.

"Ah, it's Touka-chan."

Inukai Touka. We're in the same class together.

Contrary to her very petite build and wonderfully adorable facial features, she's the star performer in the Judo Club and frighteningly strong. Strong enough to earn the title of Akebi High's Pro Fighter Honor Student. Although it seems that she's reluctant to take this title.

"Is it true that you can take down Tokyo Tower with an Osoto Gari throw on a good day?"

"Bring the one who spread that rumor here right now. I'll take them down with an Osoto Gari throw."

"Oh, that's good! I'd like one, please!"

"One of what!?"

"We're talking about judo, right?"

After I thoroughly enjoyed this heartwarming exchange with Touka, I turned my attention back to Igarashi-senpai.

“So, Touka-chan, what do you need with Igarashi-senpai? Oh, right, aren’t you on the Executive Committee too?”

“That’s right.”

She folded her arms lightly across her chest and looked stubbornly at Igarashi-senpai. Her family has been in the fireworks business for generations, and her strong-minded personality takes after her father.

“Senpai, this isn’t the time to be standing around making small talk. You were supposed to check the strength of the arc for the front gate, weren’t you? So you shouldn’t have the free time to be fooling around here! I looked all over you! Could you please not make me work extra hard like this!?”

“A-ahh, sorry. Was I gone that long?”

Although he was supposed to her senior, he was clearly overwhelmed by her outburst.

“Yes, you were. Come on, let’s get going, *right now!*”

She sure was being harsh. Touka is always pretty strict, but today, she seemed especially so.

“Hibari, today was misfortunate, wasn’t it?”

As she pulled Igarashi away, Touko mumbled this to me without looking back.

“Touka-chan seemed a bit annoyed, hm? The committee members sure are busy.”

Yue said this as she watched the two leave, but I knew the real reason for Touka’s irritation.

She must have been devoting herself to the Akebi Festival preparations to avoid thinking about it—the condition of her close, childhood friend, Amemura Saho.

“See you tomorrow!”

After I waved goodbye to Yue in front of the school gates, I then hopped into a streetcar in Shinbashi.

As I swayed with the vehicle’s movement, I looked out at cityscape dyed in a soft golden hue.

Recently, there were more people using cars or buses, so even the subways weren’t that crowded. This somehow relaxed space felt comfortable.

There were people waiting for the water bus to go to Asakusa.

And people busily coming and going from a newspaper company.

A goldfish stand in the middle of the bridge trying to attract passing children.

I had a feeling that even now, there would be the delicious smell of pork sauté drifting out of the diner.

In the streets were scooters, trucks, and bicycles, and if you closed your eyes, you could always hear some hit song coming from a dance hall crowded with young people.

I’m sure that enough years have passed for it not to be considered the postwar era anymore.

I was a little late coming back from school today. I wonder if that person has been lonely without me.

That would be nice. Although I didn’t think it was possible....

As that person's face came to mind, my downcast mood since this morning was immediately lifted up. Without thinking, I began humming to "Let's Meet in Yurakucho."

"This is Ginza, you know!"

Although the kid sitting in front of me pointed that out, I told him not to mind the little details and continued singing regardless.

The streetcar moved along leisurely, passing by Mitsukoshi Department Store.

I got off at Kanda Station and walked on foot.

Going along with my now-uplifted mood, I chased after my long shadow as I ran. I found it funny that each time, my pigtail braids would bounce like ears of fresh rice. I breathed in timing with the bouncing of my braids.

Taking deep breaths, I headed into a maze of alleys.

I made my through those narrow streets without getting lost.

As I passed by an old house, a dog in the garden started barking happily. By the time the dog's barks had become far away, I had arrived in front of a western-style house.

The outer wall of pale brown brick was covered with ivy, and the sorry excuse of a garden was full of plants and trees. The building had two stories, but the structure itself was small, with windows covered by thick curtains. As a whole, the house looked as old as the tattered shoes of someone who had gone on a long journey. What a shady building it was.

Truthfully, everyone that uses these alleys usually looks at this house with suspicious eyes. And there are also rumors about a bad person living in this mansion.

A bad person. In other words, a monstrous doctor who creates mad inventions, or a painter that squeezes the blood of kidnapped children for the sake of art—basically, the type of bad people that you would see in picture-story shows.

But in reality, the person that lives here is neither of these, and well, from a certain perspective, he's far stranger than any of those fictional characters.

Dusk was already approaching. The clouds in the sky looked like an intricate maze, or even a magic circle, and somehow, that made the building in front of me seem even more mysterious, but still, I pushed open the front door without hesitation. Inside, there was a narrow entrance hall, and on the right, a staircase that led to the second floor. Beneath my feet was a red carpet. On the ceiling were four simple light fixtures.

As I slowly made my way down the corridor that continued throughout the length of the first floor, a heavy door with a beautiful wood grain appeared on my left hand side.

He should be in here. When I was outside, I had seen the lights turned on in this room.

After straightening my skirt, wiping away my sweat, and taking a deep breath, I knocked lightly on the door.

There was no answer, but I paid that no mind and opened the door.

"Sensei!"

I entered the room with the urgency of a detective arriving on the scene.

“Sensei, listen to this! Today, something strange....”

I started to report about today’s happenings first thing. However, I was unable to find my next words.

It wasn’t a misunderstanding or some kind of illusion. There was a bear standing right in the middle of the room.

Not just a man that looked like a bear, but an actual bear.

In the center of the western-styled room, a bear stood dauntingly on its hind legs.

It had to be at least two meters tall.

Its front legs were raised up proudly, as if to say, “I’m a bear! Scared, aren’t ya!”

I jumped once, and then stood completely frozen at the sight of its wide, open mouth and the admirable set of fangs inside.

Uwaaah, it’s a bear! It *is* a bear, right? Not just a burly weasel? Or an overgrown dog? Ahh, it’s so brown. Come to think of it, it takes so long for the sun to set now. Well, it’s May, after all. I’d better work hard for the Akebi Festival. Uwaaah, it’s a bear!

I couldn’t move a single step, or even utter a scream; only the thoughts in my head kept going around in circles.

It was then that I heard a voice from right behind me.

“Oh? There’s a stuffed model of Hibari-kun standing in a place like this? It looks rather well made,”

Hearing that voice, I was finally able to break free of my paused state.

When I turned around, I saw a man standing there.

He was slender, with a high stature——

Wearing a open-collared shirt and black vest——

A wrinkle of displeasure between his eyebrows——

And yet, he had a sharp smile on his face.

“Sensei!”

There stood Kudou Renma.

“It’s a bear! *A bear!* Like, roar! And grrr! I’ll figure something out, so please escape through the back door! It’s alright! I’ll manage somehow with the kendo I learned from my grandpa! Ah, wait! I don’t have a bamboo sword! P-please bring me another rod-like object to use instead! Hurry, bring me a something rod-like of the appropriate length!”

“You’re noisy!”

“Oww...”

He pulled on my cheek with a tug.

“Quite a talkative stuffed model. It’s even noisier than the real thing,”

After saying this, he patted my cheek and then walked towards the bear.

“As I thought, stuffed models are best when quiet.”

“Sensei, it’s dangerous!”

“Stuffed model.”

He stood in front of the fearsome-looking bear, gazing up at it leisurely.

“Sensei, it’s going to eat you whole!”

“Like I said, it’s a stuffed model.”

“Huh?”

“It’s a stuffed brown bear.”

He said this, and as if knocking on a door, he rapped his knuckles against the bear’s belly. Come to think of it, the bear hadn’t moved an inch since the very beginning.

“Wh-why is there a stuffed bear....”

“It’s for my work.”

“Eh?”

“In my next work, the main plot point is a trick that uses a stuffed bear. And in order to research how a real stuffed bear is made, I went and acquired one from a certain trade.”

“What... did you just say? For a trick? Sensei, you bought a brown bear... so that you could write your novel? An entire brown bear... just for that?”

“*Just* for that? It was all for the sake of my work. That is more important than anything,”

The author affirmed this in an unwavering tone.

I heaved a huge sigh and sank down.

I thought I’d figured out how his mind worked, but once again, he had amazed me.

“I’m sure that the only mystery writer who would go that far is you....”

Kudou Renma.

A mystery writer who has published many full-length novels, as well as short stories.

Of those, his “Musui (Sleepless) Series,” a series of mystery light novels featuring the great detective, Habikino Musui, in stories such as “The Serial Murder Case at Rokudo Island” and “The Spiriting Away Case at The House of Ten Bulls” has gained frenzied support from a portion of his readers.

However, because the contents are often so strange and bizarre, they aren’t very well accepted with the general public.

For example, the entire novel could be written as one long, continuing text with no periods, or there would be plays within plays that repeat well over thirty times to confuse the readers.

"It perfectly reflects the writer's eccentric personality, doesn't it....."

"Did you say something?"

"No, nothing at all! I was simply realizing anew the reason why Sensei's books don't sell very well."

"Of course not. This kind of sublime work isn't something that can be so effortlessly understood by the masses! In the first place, those broad-minded, sharp individuals with such artistic sensibility aren't to be counted among the ordinary masses."

It was useless.

I had already given up on trying to blame him for his actions. No matter what I say, he barely acknowledges it at all. That's the kind of person that Kudou Renma is.

If it's for the sake of his work, absolutely nothing is too outrageous.

Yes, like preparing a bear for writing a trick in his novel, and even wielding a saw in his hands——

".....A saw?"

Although I had overlooked it before, I now saw that Sensei held a huge saw in his hands.

"I went to the storeroom earlier to retrieve this."

"What do you intend to do with it...?"

"Quite clearly, I'm going to dismantle this stuffed model. I'll chop off its head, cut open its stomach, and see what it looks like inside."

"Waaah——!"

I lunged recklessly at him, snatching the saw away.

"What are you thinking! Even if it's only a stuffed model now, you can't do something like that! Sensei, you demon! You dismantling fiend!"

"Don't interfere. I want to see the structure of the inside of a stuffed bear with my own two eyes! I also want to know how long it takes for a single man to dismantle one to pieces. That's the very reason I've prepared this stuffed model and saw for!"

"You can't!"

"Come now, Hikari-kun, hold down the front legs for me."

"No——!"

"Fine. I'll wrap up the head in newspaper for you to take home as a souvenir."

"Don't wrap it up!"

"Do you intend to take it home as is!? An adolescent girl and a freshly-severed bear head. When you think about it, that doesn't sound so bad, either!"

"Don't do such terrible things to Kumamichi!"

“Don’t go giving it a name!”

After going back and forth like this for a while, we finally calmed down. In the end, we settled on keeping the stuffed bear as a decoration in the corner of the room.

“I’m glad it all worked out, Kumaemon.”

“What happened to Kumamichi?”

With a tremendously displeased face, the author undid one of the buttons on his shirt, took a fistful of coffee beans straight from the small bottle on the table, and began gnawing on them.

No matter how you looked at it, this behavior was abnormal. If someone saw this when meeting him for the first time, nine of the ten people would probably already have one foot out the door, and immediately excuse themselves from this mansion, saying with a forced smile that they’d just remembered an errand (even if they didn’t actually have one).

Crunch crunch, grind grind—

It was almost like he was possessed by something.

“Let me go make you some coffee,”

I turned around and hurried towards the kitchen.

Without a moment’s hesitation, I took coffee beans and a hand-net from the cupboards, and immediately started to roast the beans. After a few minutes, the thin skins of the beans began to peel.

Whenever he’s in a particularly bad mood, or hasn’t drunken any coffee in a long time and wants to right away, Kudou-sensei would chew on coffee beans instead.

Also, there is a subtle difference between the way he chews if it was the former or latter, and I know that difference.

Just now, that way of chewing was because he’d been so focused on his manuscript since this afternoon and hadn’t had any coffee in a long time.

As for his displeased face, that’s how he always is, so I paid it no mind.

After being deeply roasted, the beans would be ground coarsely, and the water quickly poured at a high temperature. These are the steps to bring out the flavor that he likes.

But even so, he’s such a strange person. As I recalled the incident with the bear, I sighed.

He’s a strange and troublesome person.

Mean-spirited.

Overbearing.

Sharp-tongued.

Oblivious.

Only thinking of his work all the time.

If he hadn't become an author, I honestly think he would have become a big-time villain.

The beans slowly changed color, and a fragrant scent rose up.

My relationship with the author goes back to when I was little.

My house is in the corner of Kanda Jinbocho, and my father uses part of the house as a coffee shop. The shop was run by my grandpa before the war, and after the war ended, my father succeeded it. At that time, I hadn't even entered elementary school yet, and was only just beginning to understand what went on around me.

The name of the store is "Tsuki Fune."

For a while after the war, it seemed that there were still many troubles. The Allied Occupation forces would try to sell unwanted government assets to the customers, and they would also have to substitute soy beans in place of coffee beans.

And the regular of that "Tsuki Fune" had been the young Kudou-sensei, who had only just started out as an author.

This is why I've known him from since back then, and he also knows me from when I used to be a crybaby.

The beans made a popping sound, and after I let them soak for a moment longer, I turned off the stove.

I learned everything about making coffee from my father.

I have no mother.

Seated deeply in the black sofa and with his arms crossed, the author watched the steam rise from the coffee I had made, as if gazing at a beautiful piece of fine art.

Behind me, there were rows of tall bookshelves that towered over me. Not unlike a library.

And if that wasn't enough, the books that didn't fit in the shelves were scattered everywhere around the room. It was a sight I was used to.

"And then, when I went out on the roof, I saw my friend collapsed—"

Because of the stuffed bear model, I'd had to postpone it a great deal, but now, I finally explained to the author about what had happened this morning. However, from the moment I'd begun speaking, he had picked up a book that was lying on the table—Yokomizo Seishi's new work—and started to read it. At intervals, he took sips from his coffee.

"Sensei! Would you please listen to me?!"

I accused him as I was nearing the end of my speech.

"And you want to say that she fell from the sky, don't you?"

He told me flatly. So he had actually been listening, then.

All the while that I'd been talking, he had continued to flip through the pages of the books at a constant rate, making me wonder what the inside of this person's head looked like. Once again, I found him strange. Rather than the inside of the stuffed bear model, I was much more interested in the inside workings of his head.

"Do you think that people can just come falling down like that?"

"You witnessed it yourself, didn't you? Weren't you the first one on the scene?"

"Well, that's true, but...."

"Listen, in most of the cases where humans exceed their boundaries and try to force themselves into heaven, they bring unto themselves the wrath of God. Like with Icarus, who flew too close to the sun, and the Tower of Babel from the Old Testament."

"And like with the Spider's Thread, right?"

"That's something entirely different."

"Eh~"

In any case, I understood that angering God usually wouldn't bring anything good.

"In some cases, they're cast down to the ground from heaven. People call that *tenbatsu*. Divine punishment."

"Divine... punishment?"

"Now didn't you say that there was a message left behind?"

——It's X.

"Ah! *Batsu*! Another way to read X is *batsu*, meaning punishment!"

"It just means that's one way to look at it. In the first place, do you really believe God granted that student divine punishment and dropped them to the ground?"

"Well, no, I don't, but.... I thought maybe some unknown power could have thrown Saho up into the air and...."

And then I realized something.

"I know! It was the wind! What if she got caught up in a huge gust of wind?"

I blurted out as soon as the thought came to me.

"If there had been a wind strong enough to lift a person, there would have been other damage at that place to prove it,"

He simply laughed off my idea.

"And from what I've heard, it doesn't seem likely that a strong wind would only blow in that place, so I don't think so."

I was satisfied with the mere fact that he'd even considered the possibility.

"Anyway, if it is 'punishment,' then the meaning deepens a lot. I'd thought for sure that X meant Ex."

"Ex? Oh, that fake activist?"

The author immediately guessed what I was talking about.

"The one you're always mentioning these days."

"Yes. The unidentified activist, Ex, who's been the topic of talk at Akebi High. 'Ex has appeared again! A fearless confession of crime!' and so on—the newspaper club is always writing about it every week."

Was it a man, or a woman? A student, or a teacher? At the time, it was a person shrouded in complete mystery. No one even knew if it was only one person, or actually a group.

In places like the walls at school, or on the principal's desk, Ex would leave radical messages directed at the school. Sometimes, they even hijacked the school broadcast system and played the "International School Song."

Their main claim was this.

—The current chairman, as well as the school principal, are puppets of the United States of America.

—Year after year, they steal freedom from the students, and are tumors that need to be removed.

Because of those claims, it was clear that the school would want to catch the culprit as soon as possible. As a result, their control over the student body had become stricter.

Students that showed shady behavior. Students that brought strange objects to school. One after another, questionable students were brought to the Guidance Office.

However, each of those ended in nothing, and presently, Ex continued their activities while evading the eyes of the students and teachers.

"A child's play that the Student Council Federation longs for," is what the teachers called it outright.

The Student Council Federation, the full name being the National Federation of Student Councils. This federation had been formed several years after the war, consisting of over 140 members of the student councils in Japan.

Recently, they've engaged in various operations going against the Japan-US Safety Treaty, and in the spring, there had been a violent collision with the police.

By the way, half of what I know concerning these matters is what the author has told me.

In any case, it was true that the entire school body was embracing that radical impression.

"I thought that there might be some kind of connection between Ex and that message....."

X meant punishment. After hearing the author's interpretation, I wasn't so sure anymore.

"By the way, which do you think it is this time?"

"What do you mean?"

I was startled by the sudden question.

"The case of this student named Amemura, was it an accident? A suicide? Or perhaps a murder?"

"Th-that's....."

Honestly, I didn't know. The school seemed to be trying to pass it off as an accident, but in reality, none of us had any idea.

"Hey, wait a minute! Saho is still alive, you know! Whether it was a suicide or a murder, at least call it an attempt!"

"It doesn't matter either way."

What an insensitive person. And crude, too. Is he really a mystery novelist?

"But if you really think about it, it's not likely to have been a suicide. If it was, then she would have jumped properly from the rooftop to the garden to end things."

Although it felt weird to phrase it as "jumped properly."

"And if you consider how there was a message written in blood left behind, she seems to have fallen on the roof involuntarily. If it really was a suicide, she could have just written a suicide note. I wouldn't think that she would go to the trouble to use her own blood to leave behind a message."

In that case, there was a high possibility that someone else had meant to do her harm.

"I don't know what method they might have used, but in that case, Ex is suspicious, after all."

"Then that would make this Ex a huge fool."

"Why's that?"

"Because they failed to kill her,"

With wise eyes, the author said this, and then silently folded his arms across his chest.

"If this really is the work of someone else, it would have been a failed murder, disregarding whatever trick he'd set up in this mysterious crime scene, in a school where he could be easily seen by others, no less. It would be the pinnacle of a failure."

He did have a point, though.

"Sensei, are you trying to understand it from the culprit's point of view?"

He seemed like the type that would admit to killing outright.

"Such rudeness! I would never do the dirty work myself!"

"Is that something you should be saying proudly?!"

Still, just like he'd said, why had they chosen the school?

"According to your story, there weren't many other students around when you went to the school early in the morning?"

"Yes. I didn't see anyone else on my entire way up to the roof."

"What time do the school gates open?"

"At 5 AM. It seems that they're opening it a bit earlier this week for the Akebi Festival preparations. When I arrived at school, it was around 5:20."

The author closed the book that he had been reading from beginning to end throughout our entire conversation, and placed it back down on the table.

"Don't tell me..... You finished reading that book while we've been talking this whole time?"

"Yes, I did, and what of it?"

He made a face as if to tell me not to ask pointless things. It's been so since a long time ago, but the author's ability to speed-read is like some kind of magic trick.

“So, what about other routes to go up to the rooftop?”

“Eh? Th-there aren’t any!”

I hurried to answer, and the author continued after resting his slightly narrow chin in his hand.

“If I remember, wasn’t there another school building?”

“There’s the north building and the south building. Both have four floors, and the one that Saho had collapsed on was the south building.”

There’s a corridor that connects the two buildings.

“If all four floors are connected by corridors, it would be simple to come and go between the two buildings using those—”

“The only corridor connecting the buildings is on the first floor.”

When moving between classes, you have to go down to the first floor in order to use the corridor to go to the next building.

“What a troublesome building!” The author childishly cried out in complaint.

We heard the pendulum sounding 6 PM from the hallway.

“.....Um, could this be one of those extremely bizarre and troublesome cases?”

The culprit, method, and motive—all of them were unknown.

In the first place, we had only come to the conclusion that it was a crime committed by someone through the process of elimination. All in all, it was only a baseless assumption.

Even if we treated it as an accident, we didn’t know how she had fallen onto the roof.

“Hey.”

And if it was a suicide, along with the mystery of the situation that had been created, we didn’t know why she had chosen that way of killing herself.

“If someone had been trying to harm her, then..... Saho must have been called out by someone and.....”

“Hey!”

“Eh?”

When I looked up, the author was making a genuinely displeased face.

Ah, this was the face he makes when he’s truly annoyed.

“Hibari-kun. Are you perhaps trying to meddle and solve this mystery on your own?”

It was a lucky guess.

Or rather, I didn’t realize it until he’d said so,

Before I’d noticed, I had become engrossed in tackling this mystery by myself.

“For goodness sake. It’s become a bad habit of yours now. Your love for mystery novels is a problem, as well. Whenever you see any kind of strange event, you immediately immerse yourself in it. You meddle without even thinking of the consequences! Do you think that deductive reasoning is really a feat that a bean girl such as you could pull off? You have to observe the world in front of you brutally, and be willing to doubt everything. It’s impossible for you, who, in the first place, can’t even view the world obliquely.”

“Wh-what!? I was just concerned about my friend..... And anyway, Sensei! Aren’t you always happy to fuel my sloppy reasoning?!”

“That’s only something I do when I have the free time. However, I’m busy with writing today. Because of you preventing me from dismantling the bear, I have to come up with a different trick. And also, just like every other day, your pigtails are as unappealing as the shrine rope at a deserted shrine.”

“My pigtails have nothing to do with this!”

It seemed he still held a grudge over me because of the bear.

“Since it can’t be helped, let me tell you an innovative solution. As soon as you hear it, this situation, which can barely even be called a case, will be solved in an instant,”

After asserting this, the author leaned close to me.

Close close way too close!

Without thinking, I leaned back to look up at him.

Somehow, he seemed different than before.

“Hibari-kun.”

“Y-yes?!”

“Do you know what the smartest solution to a real case is?”

“That would be.... A great detective would figure out the real culprit based on even the smallest clue.....”

He slowly shook his head. There was a daring confidence in his eyes.

“No, you should have the victim directly tell you who the culprit is,”

He said confidently.

For a while, I was speechless, forgetting to close my mouth that hung open.

“Th-that’s just cruel! Nothing’s going to come out of that!”

“The victim would have witnessed the incident from the very beginning, so that would be the best way. In most of the cases where the victim survives, they’ll know who the culprit is. The victim’s life is saved, and the culprit will be caught immediately. That’s the ideal outcome, isn’t it? Of course, if this were a detective novel, it would be a very boring work. See? This way, there’s no more reason to worry. Simply wait for that student to regain consciousness and ask her for the truth.”

“But—!”

“Now then, my throat’s gone dry again after talking so much. Hibari-kun, go make me another cup of coffee.”

The author held no regard for my feelings and waved his empty cup at me.

“I refuse! Go make it for yourself!”

“Hmph, how impudent. In that case, we’ll decide it with this,”

Saying this, he ignored my complaints and extended his hand.

Whenever there was something to decide on, he would always suggest this. And as I already knew this, I agreed without question.

“.....We’ll settle this in one match.”

“Of course.”

After a second,

“Rock, paper—”

“Scissors!”

I played scissors. It was a quite a fine-looking scissors, if I did say so myself. The shape wasn’t bad at all.

However—

“Ahaha! Looks like it’s my win.”

What the author had played was—something I didn’t quite understand.

“Sensei..... What is that?”

“It’s a fox.”

Honk honk.

And with that said, he clamped my nose shut with his hand in that form.

“Wha? Stobb dat—! Stop that—! What do you mean, a fox?! Why would there be a fox in a game of rock-paper-scissors?!”

“Foxes are tricksters. And because you were tricked by the fox, you lost. Now then, go and make me that coffee. And after that, go straight home.”

“Ugh! Fine, I get it already!”

In actuality, I didn’t get any of this. I just no longer had the energy to go against the author’s words anymore, which were unreasonably about twelve percent of the time. Ten percent of that twelve either consisted of far-fetched arguments, and the remaining two percent were usually tall tales .

I went back to the kitchen again.

As I poured the second cup of coffee, I thought about Saho, and about God.

Was it Ex? Or was it punishment?

If it was punishment, did that mean divine punishment?

Had Saho received some kind of punishment?

It would seem that God hated those who tried to get too close to Him. Those that feared the legends would say as much.

Even if I wasn't a god, naturally, I would get angry if someone just came and sat themselves at the door of my house, but even so, it was just too unreasonable.

Say, God, didn't those people who tried to get close to heaven all have their own circumstances and reasons for doing so?

Some secret, serious, and clear circumstance.

translation notes:

Osoto Gari (大外刈): In judo, a major sweeping leg throw.

Sensei (先生): the title that Hibari calls Kudou out of respect. Used for people that are experts of their profession, such as teachers, professors, doctors, and also writers and authors. I thought "Author" sounded kind of weird, and since I plan on keeping honorifics like -kun, -san, -senpai, and since the story is set in Japan and wouldn't look too out of place as is, I just decided to keep it.

Hibikino Musui (羽曳野無睡) the detective in Kudou's novel series. His first name, "Musui," is written with kanji that means "sleepless."

Rokudou (六道): In Buddhism, the "six paths" or six realms in which people go after death.

Ten Bulls (十牛 / jyuugyuu): ten ways of herding ox. Used as an analogy for training the mind to reach enlightenment.

Kuma (クマ): means "bear." Since they were names, I just decided to keep them too.

Batsu: in Japanese, the word batsu can mean the an "X" (as in the shape), or "punishment (罰)"



Teniwoha's novel for his Schoolgirl Detective Series, "**The Schoolgirl Detective and Eccentric Author – Night Before The Murder Case at the Mansion of Antiquarian Books,**" acts as a prequel to the first song in the series, "Murder Case at the Mansion of Antiquarian Books," and follows the events between the schoolgirl detective who loves mystery novels, Hanamoto Hibari, and the extremely sadistic mystery novel writer, Kudou Renma.

The first part in this three-part novel is called: *Suicide Case at Akebi High Rooftop*.

“As the high school is busy with preparations for the Culture Festival, a female student is found on the roof, collapsed and bleeding.

Written in blood is a single “X.” Is this an accident? Or a case? Hibari sets out to uncover the truth.”

This part is further divided into three chapters, so here’s the second one! I’ve decided to post this chapter in two separate parts, due to length. Masterpost with links to all the translated chapters can be found [here](#).

[←Pt.1, Ch.1](#) | [Pt.1, Ch.2 \(second half\)](#)→

* If you can, I highly encourage supporting the creators by buying the book for yourself at [Amazon](#)! (also, I most likely won’t be scanning the illustrations, so if you’d like to see them, there’s another reason to buy it)

—

Chapter Two: Don’t Twirl Your Pigtails (first half)

—It would seem that Amemura Saho had attempted suicide.

The following day, the whole school was buzzing over Saho’s suicide attempt.

I was bewildered when I heard this from my classmates, just as soon as I’d walked into the classroom that morning.

But why? It was only yesterday that the teachers and I had talked about the unlikelihood of it being a suicide.

“I heard that Amemura-san was being bullied.”

After I heard that, my confusion increased. My heart clenched in pain.

Even though she was an honor student, or maybe because of that fact, she had been bullied by a group of other students.

Sometimes even with direct violence.

I had no idea about any of this.

Thinking back on it now, I *had* noticed that something seemed off. I had seen fresh bruises on her arms before. But whenever I asked about them, she’d always just tell me it was nothing.

She must have been trying hard to hide it from everyone else.

“So that’s why she tried to end her suffering with suicide...”

“There’s no way that’s true!”

Before I could even object to my classmate’s words, Touka beat me in denying it.

“Saho isn’t that weak.....”

I waited until it was break time to ask Touka about it.

“Yeah, I knew alright.”

As I'd thought, Touka had known about Saho being bullied. And up until now, she had stood up for Saho a countless number of times.

However, Saho had never wanted Touka to help her.

"Even though that girl's usually so mature, she becomes stubborn over the strangest things."

Saho had said that she'd manage by herself, and that she had to solve this and overcome it on her own.

"That idiot. Even with how much she was looking forward to the Akebi Festival,"

Touka muttered quietly.

Saho probably wouldn't be able to attend the festival.

It seemed that she still hadn't regained consciousness.

Touka seemed to be trying to dispel her anger and irritation by busying herself with Akebi Festival Executive Committee duties. And since I was a bit worried for her, I tried to help out with her work after school that day.

Tables, chairs, cardboard, documents, wood, instruments, costumes, equipment that I wasn't even sure the use for.

From here to there.

From there to here.

Not unlike an apprentice, I worked hard to move all these different things around.

However, since I wasn't particularly strong, I didn't feel like I was helping all that much.

"It's heavy by yourself, isn't it?"

Touka, who was on the way to the incinerator to throw out the trash leftover from the booth preparations, came to my aid.

Even though she's so small, where does she get all that horsepower from! That's all I could think about when I saw the amount of trash she was carrying with her.

Despite the fact that I was trying to help her out, she was now helping me instead.

I suddenly remembered that since I still hadn't finished what I needed to do for the Art Club, this certainly wasn't the time to helping someone else. I couldn't help but become anxious.

I could hear mixed voices of joy and distress coming from each classroom as they rushed with the preparations.

Someone knocking over paint, or accidentally hitting their fingers with hammers, and in the midst of it all, another confessing to the girl he liked. There was no shortage of things to see.

A free bazaar, a booth selling handmade sweets, and more—there was a variety of different booths between each class.

"Woah! Touka-chan, check it out! This class has a car's steering wheel! Are they selling it? Oh, they have the tires, too! Ah, and even the engine."

“Did they really just take apart an entire car and bring it here?! As a member of the Executive Committee, I won’t allow that!”

“Looks like they’re trying to open up a hole in the floor of this classroom to make a pitfall to the first floor. I wonder why—”

“That’s out of the question!”

Although there was some misdirection, everyone seemed enthusiastic about the Akebi Festival.

By the way, my class had decided to run a café.

“I understand it being a café, but.... Why ‘Youkai Jazz Café’?”

A wrinkle formed on Touka’s forehead as she sighed.

“It’s a jazz café run by youkai.”

“Yeah, I got that much, at least.”

Because the class couldn’t agree on whether to do a haunted house or a café, we had compromised and decided on a Youkai Jazz Café.

“The youkai are happy to serve you! Once you drink this excruciatingly delicious youkai coffee, you’ll go to heaven!”

The class had united with that theme.

“It’s weird, isn’t it?!”

“Yeah, you’re right. It’s weird. Youkai don’t go to heaven, do they?”

“That’s weird too, but not exactly what I meant.”

“By the way, Touka-chan, what youkai were you dressing up as again?”

“.....Kejourou.”

Kejourou is a female youkai with long hair that flows all the way down to her ankles.

According to "The Illustrated One Hundred Demons from the Present and the Past" by the Edo ukiyo-e artist, Toriyama Sekien, he had run up to a woman who, from behind, looked like someone he knew, only to find a prostitute with hair that covered her entire face, hence being named Kejourou (“hair prostitute”).

“Never heard of it! Why couldn’t I have gotten a more well-known youkai, like the Hitotsu-me Kozou (“little one-eyed boy”) or Rokuro Kubi (“long-necked woman”)!”

“Well, I like her! The Edo ukiyo-e artist, Utagawa Toyokuni, used Kejourou as the subject of a love story—”

“You sure know a lot.....”

“It’s just what I’ve heard from a friend.”

We headed down to the first floor as we talked, but suddenly, we were stopped.

There were countless sheets of paper spread out in the middle of the hallway, blocking us from going any further.

A single male student was writing something on those papers with an ink brush.

“Brother, what do you think you’re doing?”

At Touka’s abrupt words, the student stopped writing and looked up. He had very deep facial features.

“Ah, sister, what a way to greet your older brother.”

Come to think of it, I remembered Touka mentioning before that she had a brother. It would seem that this person would be that brother, then.

“I’m Inukai Juurou. Thanks for always looking after my sister. She must be hard to see since she’s so small.”

“Oh, no, not at all. Actually, there are times I want to pick up Touka-chan like a cat and spin her around, but since I’ll just be scratched, I refrain from doing so.”

“Hibari, have you really felt that kind of impulse when you’re around me?!”

Oh, how careless.

“So, Juurou-senpai, what are you doing here?”

“I’ve been steadily carrying out my job,”

Saying this, he picked up one of the papers he’d just finished writing on and held it out for us to see.

In large, heavy print, this was what was written:

“Please do not remove too many wood sliding panels!”

“Every year, there’s always people that go overboard and end up damaging school property, whether it’s equipment or glass windows. Well, damage to school property is one thing, but it’ll be no joke if someone gets hurt. That’s why I’ve decided to deter any misconduct by putting these posters up all over the school. As the president of the Disciplinary Committee!”

Only the last part was said in an excessively loud voice. Touka, clearly annoyed at her brother, shouted at him,

“Your explanation was too long! If you’re going to talk, then say it in less than five words, stupid brother.”

That hardly seemed like enough words to explain with.

“By the way, my brother’s always been good with his hands, if nothing else, so I often had him make posters and origami rings and things. But regardless, whether you’re the president of the Disciplinary Committee or the Discipline-airy Committee, you’re in the way! Go to the back! Like you would before a feudal lord’s procession!”

“What was that, sister of mine! Have a taste of that petting attack you hate so much—!”

It then took five minutes to break up the sibling fight that had suddenly started.

“S-speaking of which—”

After being thrown over his sister’s shoulder once, Juurou-senpai dusted off his school uniform while wearing a calm guise.

“Are you the rumored pigtail girl that found and saved Saho-chan?”

“I hardly did any saving. I was just the first to discover her. Um, do you know Saho personally?”

"Of course. When we were little, she often came over to play with Touka. Back then, I'd tag along to play with them, too. I still have many heartwarming memories of when we'd mix gunpowder that we hid from our father's workplace, or that time we tried to ride a raft we'd made ourselves down Sumida River and nearly drowned."

As if her own memories had been triggered by her brother's words, a tired expression emerged on Touka's face. It would seem that Juurou-senpai was the only one that found those memories to be heartwarming.

"Actually, what did you mean by 'rumored pigtail girl'?"

"You mean you don't know? 'Well done, pigtail girl! The savior of a female student!' That's how they're all writing it up in the school newspaper."

Since when had this happened? Once the teachers read the latest newspaper and found out about Saho's case spreading throughout the school, they'd probably all have a fit. But even without the aid of the newspaper, word of the incident had already begun to spread in the early stages.

"Are my pigtails really my only distinguishing feature...?"

"That's not true. You have that mole under your eye too, don't you? It's a symbol of a good woman. Oh, but if your pigtails fell off for some careless reason and you came to school the next day, I probably wouldn't be able to recognize you."

What a terrible thing to say. In the first place, pigtails don't go falling off just like that.

"In any case, thank you for saving Saho-chan! I'm really glad that the worst didn't happen. I was... pretty worried myself this time, and I felt frustrated by it, too."

As he spoke, his voice gradually grew softer. Was he frustrated because of her bullying?

"Juurou, I finished putting up all the posters you gave me,"

And then appeared Igarashi-senpai.

"Igarashi-senpai, are you helping out too?"

"Yes, as a member of the Executive Committee, I feel it's imperative that any accidents during the festival be prevented."

I was honestly impressed with the extent to which the Executive Committee carried out their job.

"Um..."

"What is it?"

I pointed at Igarashi-senpai's hand.

"I've been wondering since yesterday but, did you injure your hand?"

There were bandages wrapped lightly around his left hand.

"Yeah, it happened when I was carrying some equipment. Just a minor wound. Executive Committee members end up helping out with a lot of things, you see, depending on wherever help is needed."

Certainly, I could relate very well with that notion right now.

"If the number of injured can be reduced with my labor instead, it's a small price to pay. And anyway, Ex might make

some kind of move during the festival. No, I'm certain that they'll try to pull something, and I want to prevent that, at all costs."

"I'll give a hand however I can, as well," added Juurou-senpai,

"Leave patrol on the festival day to the Disciplinary Committee! That Ex fellow is cunning. He's constantly making statements around the school, as if to sew shut our watchful eyes. Like Yuuma said, we have to keep our guards up while the festival's going on."

Right, tomorrow would finally be the day of the Akebi Festival.

That day, in order to finish up everything before the festival, many of the students stayed behind at school until sunset to do last minute preparations.

I took the initiative to stay behind, but since there was a notice telling non-boarding students to go home as soon as possible, I had no choice but to leave.

Yue saw me off with a wave at the entrance. Since she stayed in the on-campus dormitory, it looked like she would still be staying at school.

I waved back from afar and shouted,

"Yue-chaaan, when you see the station name, Ochanomizu, don't you feel thirsty—?"

"Is that really something to be asking *now*—?"

After leaving the school, I obediently headed for home—no, of course not.

Today, I would be taking the familiar route to visit the author's house again.

Along the way, I saw a huge group of people heading down the street. They wore helmets, and carried a large banner. The students that protested the vote for a new Security Treaty.

I didn't know much about politics, but they were talking more eagerly than I could have imagined, and seemed to be carrying out their activities. Now and then, I would overhear talk of something dangerous. I was afraid that someone might turn up dead by the end of it.

I couldn't predict what kind of radical action that Ex, who seemed to be imitating these people with his activities at school, might pull again. In which case, it didn't seem unnatural that there was some circumstance for what had happened to Saho.

"Sensei—! I've come to see you again today. Have you become all shriveled up like a malnourished dried sardine —?"

Once I threw open the door of the study as soon as I arrived at the mansion, I saw a man with his back facing this way. However, it wasn't Kudou-sensei's back.

"My, you seem cheerful as always,"

The man spoke in a slightly husky, almost whisper-like voice.

Messy hair, round glasses, and an indigo garment that exposed his chest.

"Kareshima-san, I didn't even know you were here!"

I couldn't believe that he'd just seem me act so shamelessly!

Quickly, I patted down my hair and skirt, and corrected my posture.

This man, with his friendly appearance and an other-worldly atmosphere about him, is Kareshima Soutatsu, the respectable owner that runs “Kokuudou,” the antique bookstore in Kanda Jinbouchou.

He’s known Kudou-sensei since their college days, and they share a senior-junior relationship.

Just like his appearance, he’s always calm, and even speaks kindly to me. I could never understand why someone as good-natured as Kareshima-san would continue to stay friends with that author for so long.

“Unlike Sensei, you’re always really gentle, and it’s calming being together with you, Kareshima-san. It’s like walking in the clear, shallow waters of a river upstream.”

“Hmph. And what’s so gentle about being in the company of this giant salamander of a man?”

“Oh, Sensei. So you were here, after all.”

When I looked over, I saw that the author was sitting in his work chair, reading a book.

“What’s with that attitude, after rushing into someone else’s home?”

“More importantly, what do you mean by ‘giant salamander’? Kareshima-san and giant salamanders don’t have a single thing in common,”

I objected such to the author’s metaphor, but Kareshima-san himself seemed unfazed.

“Perhaps he refers to how I live quietly while swaying to and fro,”

And to top it off, he was even acknowledging it.

“You see? It’s impossible to figure out what he’s thinking every day, and his ecology is shrouded in mystery. He’s practically the giant salamander of the antiquarian street.”

“Then how about changing the name of the store to Hanzaki Daimyoujin?”

Hanzaki is another name for the Japanese giant salamander. It’s said that even if you were to cut it in half, it won’t die, hence being nicknamed hanzaki (“torn in half”), however, it’s uncertain whether or not that theory is correct.

This mysterious creature has been the subject of legends and folklore, and a long time ago, it was widely told that in a place called Ryuuto-no-fuchi (“Dragon’s Head Abyss”) in Okayama Prefecture, there lived a colossal salamander that measured nearly ten meters in length, which they called Hanzaki Daimyoujin.

“—and that’s it. I haven’t left anything out, right?”

“Nope. It was a fine explanation, Hibari-chan.”

“Ehehe. Well, it’s mostly just what I’ve heard from you, Kareshima-san.”

Before inheriting Kokuudou from his father, Kareshima-san was an aspiring folklorist, and traveled to various places across Japan to do fieldwork. Naturally, he’s frighteningly well-informed when it comes to folklore, indigenous beliefs, and youkai.

The truth is, the fact that I’ve come to know so much about youkai is due to his influence.

“By the way, Kareshima-san, what brings you here today?”

"I came to bring the research materials that Senpai asked for."

It seemed that the book the author had been reading since earlier were those very ones.

"Ah, you're right. I've never seen that book around here before."

"As I'd expect from you, Hibari-chan. So you've memorized all the books that are kept here?"

"Ehehe—"

It was true. Since I came here nearly every day and was always reading the books in this house, for the most part, I'd come to learn all the titles of the books.

"But of course, I can't say that I remember every single one."

"I've said so before, but I'd like if you would come to my place and help me with the shop soon,"

Saying this, Kareshima-san took my hand and smiled.

"Come to your place—"

My face turned red, and I hurriedly pulled my hand back.

"I.... I-I-I-I-I cannot...! I.... Marriage, no, I can't!"

I shook my head violently from side-to-side, as if to say, "Oh no, no, I couldn't possibly!"

"Besides, I have yet to even witness a fox's wedding! And I'm sure that a pure white dress wouldn't suit me, and there are so many necessary preparations for marriage..... No, that's not it! I-I have someone like Sensei.... No, no, no, no! Forget what I just said! They were thoughtless words uttered by a maiden possessed by a fox!"

"Um.... Hibari-chan, I didn't really mean that in terms of marriage....."

"Jokes, nonsense, meaningless babble! Lies and incoherent mumbling, fabrications! Absurd idle chatter! All merely insignificant utterances—!"

"Just what are you going on about? Hey! Don't twirl your pigtails!"

I finally came back to senses when I heard the author speak to me. He was staring at me with downright cold eyes. Don't look at me like that!

"Oh, right! I brought something that I wanted to give to you two, as well."

Forcibly changing the subject, I opened my bag and took out a couple of booklets.

"You sure are quick to recover,"

Kareshima-san praised me once again.

"Here you go, Sensei. It's the guidebook for the Akebi Festival. Kareshima-san, there's one for you, as well. I meant to give it to you at your shop afterwards, but since you're here now, it's perfect timing."

I dutifully handed it over to both of them.

"Thank you. So it's finally happening tomorrow, huh."

"Everyone's very excited for it."

As I talked with Kareshima-san, the author finished flipping through the guidebook at an extraordinary speed.

No matter what the contents were, this was how he always is whenever he gets his hands on anything resembling a book.

“Speaking of which, the highlight of the festival, or rather, the famous attraction is this monument. Here, on this page.”

“The students at your school work together every year to build this huge monument, hm?”

“Yes. We plan to set it up in the schoolyard at noon on the first day of the Akebi Festival. And on the last day, it’s customary to make a grand show out of burning it up.”

Everyone would gather around that huge flame and give thanks for each other’s hard work. The way the flames dyed the surrounding buildings and the students’ faces in an orange glow was really rather romantic.

“By the way, I heard there was some kind of accident last year?”

Being asked that so suddenly, for a moment, I was at a loss for words.

Yes, there had been an accident.

Last year, on the second day of the Akebi Festival, the monument had been toppled over by a strong wind, and some people had been injured—at least, that’s what I heard.

I hadn’t been there to actually witness the event, so I didn’t know all the details.

On the introductory page for the monument were the following words:

“To prevent something like last year’s accident from occurring again, we have taken extra care this year, and constructed the monument with those precautions in mind. As a result, this year, it has been made significantly more lightweight, and there have also been improvements with the overall stability of the structure. Incidentally, for this year’s monument, it will be assembled with the previously-constructed parts on the day of the festival, and be transported to its designated location in the schoolyard in its completed state. We feel confident that it will be a truly enjoyable sight for the visitors. –Monument Production Crew Leader, Seno Atsuya”

“I heard that at one point, they considered discontinuing the construction of the monument altogether, but since others objected to losing that tradition, it was decided that they would build it again this year.”

“The design is kept a secret until the day it’s unveiled, if I recall.”

“That’s right. They’re very thorough in keeping it a secret until then. I believe that only the students that are on the production crew and a few of the teachers know what it looks like.”

From what I’d heard, they were supposedly going to make it even bigger than the one from last year.

I think last year’s might have been seven, or maybe even eight meters tall. I’d heard a rumor that ever since the very first year the monument’s been made, it gets bigger with each passing year, but I think that may actually be true.

“So, Kareshima-san, do you think you’ll be able to come tomorrow?”

“Well, about that, I have to organize the inventory at my store tomorrow, so I don’t think I can make it.”

"I see.... That's too bad."

Managing an antique bookstore didn't seem easy.

"My apologies. But I'll make sure to make time to come on the second day."

"Have you been busy?"

"A bit. For these past few days, I've been pulling all-nighters to get work done. But I've been able to manage by leaving the radio on to keep myself awake."

He hardly looked sleepy at all. I always felt this way whenever I talked with Kareshima-san, but he had a mysterious, hermit-like quality about him. I felt like he could live for hundreds of years eating only peaches.

"Whenever I leave the radio on, I always wind up falling asleep. That's exactly what happened the day before yesterday...."

"Did you really? It's a shame you missed it, then."

"What do you mean?"

"There was a rare incident during the broadcast that night."

"What kind of incident?"

"Some very enthusiastic fans stormed into the studio during the program, and there was an uproar for a while. You have to wonder how those kinds of people managed to get in."

"Hibari-kun,"

As I was happily chatting with Kareshima-san, the author suddenly interrupted, looking displeased, after he'd finished reading through the guidebook.

"What is the meaning of this?"

He said, and pointed at the last page of the guidebook.

"What is it, all of a sudden?"

As I approached him to see for myself, this was what was written there:

"Cover art by Hanamoto Hibari, 2nd year, Class A"

"Ah! So you've noticed, have you? As I'd expect from you, Sensei! You've even read all the way up to the credits! Yes, that's correct, it was I who did the art for this year's guidebook!"

I proudly showed the cover of the guidebook to the two of them.

"So? What do you think of this workmanship!"

However, no matter how long I waited, the response I was expecting wouldn't come.

".....Um, wow."

After a pause, that was the only word that came out of Kareshima-san's mouth.

"You must be joking! What is with this picture that disturbs the soul in such an extreme and boundless manner! It looks like rotting tofu, with eerie, mud-colored hands crawling around it!"

"How rude! That's the school building, and the fresh green trees that surround it!"

"This is supposed to be a school building? It looks like a scene from the underworld! And what's more, whose foolish idea was it to make the sky bright yellow and the ground purple? If three children were blindfolded and told to draw Yushima Seidou Temple, even that would look more decent than this."

"Uu.... You didn't have to take it that far! Sensei, you jerk!"

On the verge of tears from the author's heartless words, I kicked him in the shin.

"Guh! Why you.... If you don't behave...."

When I saw the author double over in pain, I felt a bit better.

"There was a request for the Art Club to draw the cover image, and everyone submitted their own version. And in the end, they chose mine."

"And what did the person that chose it say?"

"If I remember.... He said that on the contrary, this kind of eccentricity is rather nice, a piece that couldn't possibly be appreciated by only looking at it from a commonsense perspective."

"Enough.... Judging from the criteria for the selection process, I can already see the madness of all this. Hibari-kun, in order to appease the grudges of the other members that weren't chosen, I suggest you live humbly as a nun from now on."

"It's the beginning of a long, long journey of atonement."

In times like this, these two adults were always terribly in sync.

"If the art for the guidebook is something like this, then the piece for the exhibition day must be something rather explosive, as well,"

Said the author.

"Hmm. Well, you've always had a unique sense for color, Hibari-chan.... I wonder why, but when I look at this picture, I can feel the impermanence of the world,"

Said Kareshima-san.

"You two are terrible! But it's true that whenever I color my drawings, oftentimes it becomes something sad and sorrowful. For the exhibition piece, as well, I've taken it home to finish, but I'm still unsure of what to do. I suppose I'll be staying up all night today...."

"Hmph. Don't think about it so hard. Why do you bother to color everything so completely? For instance, if you were tell a ghost story with every little detail, would it still be scary? There's nothing wrong with leaving some things untouched."

I quietly closed my eyes, and tried to make sense of the author's words in my own terms. He continued by trying to figure out what I was thinking.

"That's right. It's important to use your brain to think. Well? Have you some idea now?"

“.....Hm?”

“This is hopeless. You’re making that face you do when your head’s become completely blank.”

“In any case, Sensei! Since you’ve read the entire guidebook, that means you’re coming tomorrow, right?”

“So noisy. As if I care about that.”

“But.....”

And with that, the author turned back to his desk as if he’d lost all interest in me. He picked up a fountain pen, wrote something down on a piece of paper, and handed it to Kareshima-san.

“I’ll have to ask you to bring me materials again. I’ve written down all the books I need here.”

“Senpai, you really work people hard. Speaking of which, we’ve received stock of the first edition of Izumi Kyouka’s book. Should I bring that on my next visit, as well?”

“Bring it to me even if it costs you your life.”

“I’d really rather not risk my life if it can be helped...”

As the two began their usual exchange, I took the opportunity to go and make coffee. I knew that whenever they started talking like this, they had a tendency to go on and on.

I went to the kitchen, and started to prepare the beans right away. Kareshima-san liked his coffee with a subdued sourness, so I used different beans than the ones for the author. The way the beans were ground, the speed with which the hot water was poured—slight changes were necessary to accommodate each of their tastes.

“Like I said, you didn’t even think of the consequences that time, and put it in your mouth—”

“How else would you know what something tastes like, without tasting it for yourself?”

As I placed the cups on a tray and returned to the study, the two of them were still talking, as expected.

“I’ve brought coffee—”

The author muttered a brief affirmative note and took his cup. I couldn’t help but smile to myself when I saw that. His face seemed to indicate that this had been very good, no, the best timing to bring coffee.

“So, what were you two talking about? It sounded very lively.”

“It happened when we still in college, when I went with Senpai to a rural village deep in the Iwate mountains. And it was there that they had a spirit festival that’s only held once every twelve years.”

“Soutatsu suddenly said that he wanted to go on a field trip to investigate there, and with barely any preparation at all, he dragged me out of the boarding house in the middle of the night.”

“But weren’t you also excited to gather some references for your novel? You actually did end up including our experiences there in a work of yours later, didn’t you?”

If there was a shady psychic in the east, they would go and find out the truth, and if there were some mysterious folklore in the west, they would go to research its origins.

It seemed that back then, they used to do things like this quite often.

"In the mansion we stayed at, they offered us many of their local cuisine, but to be honest, there was a certain food that someone raised in the city couldn't possibly eat."

".....Meaning?"

"Hibari-chan, do you like bugs?"

"Ah, I see where this is going. I'll pass on the details."

"As for Senpai, he crunched down on them without a second thought, and it was quite troublesome....."

"Did he get a stomachache?"

"Even that would have been a better outcome."

For some reason, Kareshima-san stopped there. I was too scared to even imagine what might have happened.

"In any case, it was a strange place. In that village, the people there coexisted together with monsters. That gave birth to a strong faith, to the point that it dictated their daily lives."

I didn't really understand all the details, but I was able to grasp that they'd experienced something phenomenal.

"Dictated their lives....? Like, they stopped acting like themselves?"

"Well, let's see. Peoples' sense of self is something rather hazy, not unlike ghosts and souls, so it's difficult to really define. They have the saying, 'being tempted by an evil spirit,' right? It means that you do something you normally would never do, but to a greater extent, what if you were actually being manipulated by 'something' to do it? It's frightening to even think about, no?"

Tempted by an evil spirit.

And what was that "evil spirit," exactly?

A demon, or a snake?

For some reason, those words made me remember Saho, collapsed on roof.

The blood where she had fallen. The single slipper.

I didn't know why I suddenly remembered all this, but I felt like there was some kind of connection.

For what reason she had gone to the roof at that time?

Right before the Akebi Festival?

A reason for an honor student like her to secretly go up there?

Temped by an evil spirit—

Despite all these pieces scattered everywhere, if I could only put them together, I would be able to uncover the truth of that day. But at that time, I had yet to realize this.

It was only a feeling I had.

"What, are you thinking about that rooftop incident again? You shouldn't meddle in unnecessary things. More often than not, it only brings trouble."

“But.... I think I might be on to something. I can just feel it....”

“.....Hmph. Such a helpless child you are,”

Although the author continued to complain, he suddenly stopped talking and stared straight at me.

“What’s wrong?”

“Enough with your reckless, amateur detective play-acting and reasoning. Go and bring me a dishcloth. And make sure it’s thoroughly wet.”

“Why a dishcloth?”

“Look, you’ve spilled coffee here on the desk.”

“But.... Sensei, aren’t you the one that spilled it?”

“As if I know. It was spilled in the evening, so I don’t remember.”

“But that means you *do* remember. Ah, you’re right! It’s already dry and soaked into the desk! Gosh, if only you’d said so yesterday, I could have cleaned it up then.”

“Which is why I’m telling you to bring me a wet dishcloth right now.”

“Good grief.”

I sighed, and headed for the kitchen once more. Just when I thought I’d finally come up with something, my train of thought had completely disappeared somewhere.

translation notes;

Youkai (妖怪): supernatural monsters or ghosts in Japanese folklore

Disciplinary/Discipline-airy (風紀/空気): someone suggested this translation, and I thought it was too good to pass up so I wound up using it. 風紀 (fuuki) means “discipline” and 空気 (kuuki) means “air”

Ochanomizu Station (お茶ノ水): the kanji literally means “tea water”

fox’s wedding (狐の嫁入り): may refer to atmospheric ghost lights (like will-o’-wisps, a phenomena during which it appears as if paper lanterns from a wedding procession are floating through the dark



Teniwoha's novel for his Schoolgirl Detective Series, "**The Schoolgirl Detective and Eccentric Author – Night Before The Murder Case at the Mansion of Antiquarian Books,**" acts as a prequel to the first song in the series, "Murder Case at the Mansion of Antiquarian Books," and follows the events between the schoolgirl detective who loves mystery novels, Hanamoto Hibari, and the extremely sadistic mystery novel writer, Kudou Renma.

The first part in this three-part novel is called: *Suicide Case at Akebi High Rooftop*.

“As the high school is busy with preparations for the Culture Festival, a female student is found on the roof, collapsed and bleeding.

Written in blood is a single “X.” Is this an accident? Or a case? Hibari sets out to uncover the truth.”

This part is further divided into three chapters, so here’s chapter three! Part one can be found [here](#). Masterpost with links to all the translated chapters can be found [here](#).

[←Pt.1, Ch.2 \(second half\)](#) | [Pt.2→](#)

* If you can, I highly encourage supporting the creators by buying the book for yourself at [Amazon!](#) (also, I most likely won’t be scanning the illustrations, so if you’d like to see them, there’s another reason to buy it)

“Disciplinary Committee President’s Secret Performance Behind the School Building!”

Before too long, a newspaper extra with that kind of heading was sure to turn up. Ex, who had, in fact, been Juurou-senpai, had been planning to throw the culture festival into chaos with a bomb. However, thanks to Kudou-sensei’s tactics, his role had instead been changed to the mischievous Disciplinary Committee President who had just put on an unobstructive, impromptu fireworks show at the festival.

With this, Ex, who had previously caused so much commotion throughout the school, probably wasn’t likely to appear ever again. The truth behind his identity would remain as a mystery, and quietly become sealed within the school’s dark history

“Still, why fireworks....?”

When I mumbled this, the author began with, “This is likely what happened,” before launching into his explanation.

“His father must have realized his unsettling plan, and swapped the contents of the box with fireworks. Ones that would display the three colors of the school flag in a playful manner, at that.”

When I stopped to consider that, it seemed like the only reasonable possibility.

“It’s clear that those fireworks were made with safety as a priority, as well. That could only have been done by a skilled pyrotechnician.”

It was rare for the author to praise someone in such a manner. Quite rare indeed. For such an outstanding craftsman, it probably wouldn’t have taken them long to notice that so much of their gunpowder had been stolen.

“Although, even if the bomb hadn’t been replaced with fireworks, it’s doubtful whether or not it would have even gone off.”

True... Given Juurou-senpai’s behavior when I’d confronted him, I now found it hard to imagine that he would have been able to successfully pull off his objective in that miserable state.

“.....Haah.”

But still....

“How long are you going to keep making the face of a moist senbei cracker?”

The author gave me his half-eaten candied apple. However, since it was the very one that I had paid for with my own money earlier, I honestly didn’t feel the need to be grateful for his offer.

I was still frustrated about how wrong my reasoning had been.

“In the end, I wonder why Saho went up to the roof in the first place. Would you happen to have any idea about that, as well?”

As I gnawed roughly on the candied apple, I pried him for an answer.

The author made an annoyed face, and turned away.

“Speaking of which, did you even read through the guidebook for your own culture festival?”

“The guidebook? Well, yes, I skimmed it.... Why do you ask?”

“Isn’t the monument going to be shown soon?”

I looked up at the clock tower, and saw that the hands pointed at 11:30 AM.

“Oh, you’re right. The unveiling is at noon, so I think they should have started putting it together somewhere by now. Sensei, don’t tell me you’re actually looking forward to it? Ufufu~ How childish.”

“Don’t speak nonsense. I’ll rip out your brain.”

“Eek! How?!”

“I’ve been watching them. Since this morning, students busily bringing out things like scaffoldings and framework. They’ve been taking them to the side of the south school building.”

It would seem that the monument production crew hadn’t been able to bring out all the part before the Akebi Festival started, after all. Even though it’d been kept such a secret until now, it was pitiful that on the actual day of the festival, it suddenly ended up being witnessed by the general visitors before the unveiling.

“Come with me now, if you will,”

Saying this, the author took my hand and began walking.

Although he’d had the decency to say so politely, with the way he was pulling me along like that, I had no other choice but to go with him.

Just as he’d said, in the tall grasses beside the south school building, the construction of the monument had begun. The members of the production crew called out to each other as they put together each of the parts.

Beside them, the PE teacher who had the face of someone that seemed likely to be the first to be cut down during a sword fight scene in a historical play, hence being nicknamed “Sword Fodder” by the students, shouted out instructions while pointing his bamboo sword accordingly. However, it didn’t look like anyone was paying particular attention to his instructions.

It seemed that they’d finally finished constructing about half of the monument, but it was already so tall that you had to tilt your head back to see the top of it.

It was exciting, almost like we had come back in time and were watching Tokyo Tower being constructed. The bamboo was assembled from the bottom upwards, like a ladder, and looked wide enough for a single person to climb on.

Among the working students, I spotted a face I recognized. It was the boy who had been carrying out the parts near the staircase this morning. He was being called “Leader” by the students around him.

He must have felt a gaze, because he then noticed that we were observing, and called out to us.

“Well, damn..... If possible, I’d hoped to put it all together out-of-sight...”

“Are you the leader of the monument construction crew?”

“That’s right. The name’s Seno, a third year. I’m the one who mainly designed the monument this time, although I did take in opinions from everyone else, of course.”

“I heard that this year’s monument is the biggest it’s ever been.”

“Yeah. Big, and expensive, too. We went through a lot to get this far, but it looks like we’ll be able to pull it off,”

He told us while wiping the sweat from his brow.

“Because of last year’s accident, the budget for the construction of the monument has gone down considerably.... To begin with, they were talking about banning the monument altogether at first. But the Executive Committee President, Igarashi, talked it over with the school officials, and we were able to continue carrying on this tradition.”

“Igarashi-senpai did.....?”

“Do you know him? He’s a good guy. We’ve been friends since elementary school. We live pretty close to each other, too. When we were little, we would used to have play-sword fights at the local park until it got dark out.”

As he spoke, the monument behind him grew steadily taller. “Sword Fodder”, whose instructions were being ignored for the most part, had started practicing baseball swings by himself with the idle bamboo sword. Seeing that in the background when Seno-senpai mentioned “sword fights”, it connected in a strange way and made me want to laugh.

“You know, the park that’s right behind Akebi High. Oh, and listen to this. We only applied for this high school because it was the one closest to our houses. Stupid, right? Back then, both Yuuma and I used to hate studying, but look at him now. He’s turned into a total honor student.”

Although we barely gave much response at all, Seno-senpai continued to ramble on excitedly by himself. It seemed like he genuinely enjoyed talking.

“But it sure was fun the other day. Although we ended up having to abort it, it’s been a while since he came up with such an interesting plan.... Ah, whoops,”

It was then that he closed his mouth for a moment, his expression suddenly darkening.

“Anyway, he’s amazing, really. Even after what happened to his sister during the accident, he still worked so hard to keep the monument going this year.”

“His sister? Um..... Could it be that, the person that was injured in last year’s accident was.....”

“Yeah, that was his sister. They have a pretty large age difference, so I think she’s still in elementary.... Ah, well that was last year, so she should be attending Akahashi Middle School starting from this year. Oh, looks like I’ve rambled too far. I’ll be getting back to work now,”

Having talked for a while, he returned to his construction work once more.

Afterwards, I watched the completion of the monument while standing still like a ghost. All the while, for once, the author simply waited without uttering a single comment.

The completed monument looked similar to Tokyo Tower, and close to ten meters tall. Looking up from directly below

it, it seemed even taller.

The bamboo framework that was chosen for its lightness, flexibility, and durability, fitted together firmly, and at the very summit was a heart symbol.

Furthermore, there was a large hand with its fingers wrapped around the heart in a strong grip, making it an altogether elaborate design. Seno-senpai's title for it was "Man Clenching A Heart." But I had a feeling that it spoke for itself.

"Wait! Hey, it's small, but there's a hole in that part below the heart! Geez, why didn't anyone notice that!"

Just as Seno-senpai had said, upon closer inspection, there was a small hole in the heart symbol. However, it was so small that it wasn't noticable unless you looked very carefully.

"Well, whatever. If anyone points it out, we can just say that it was left by an angel's arrow!"

Cheering right back up, he said this with a hearty laugh.

As if he'd been waiting for the moment of the monument's completion, the author muttered quietly from beside me,

"It's tall enough that you have to look up at it. It looks like it would really hurt if you fell from such a height."

When I heard those words, inside of me, a bridge formed between "howdunit" and "whodunit."

"Sensei, I've finally figured it out."

"Go on, then. If you're wrong again, I'll console you, amateur detective."

The Wind Orchestra Club that awaited in the schoolyard began to play a gorgeous piece. And as if in tune with that melody, the monument construction crew, lead by Seno-senpai, carried the monument towards the sound.

Leaving Kudou-sensei behind, I walked after them. When the monument made its appearance in the inner courtyard, cheers arose from the crowds. Everyone was looking up at it while squinting their eyes against the glare of the sun.

I didn't know who had organized it, but confetti rained down from the third and fourth story windows of both the north and south school buildings.

Music, confetti, and a huge monument that was like a portable shrine.

It was like a parade.

I immediately found who I was looking for within the dense crowd of people, since they were the only one not looking up at the monument, and instead staring down at their feet.

Even after everyone else followed the monument as it was carried to the schoolyard, only that person remained in the inner courtyard.

I listened to the cheers fading in the distance, and then called out to him.

"If it's Saho that you're worried about, I'm sure that she'll be fine, Igarashi-senpai."

Even after I'd spoke, he didn't turn around for a while.

The last bit of confetti danced persistently in the air before drifting feebly down at Igarashi-senpai's feet.

Before long, he let out a sigh and said,

“It was an accident.”

“I know. I believe it was an accident, as well. However, you unintentionally created a suspicious scene that looked like an attempted suicide on the roof. Am I right?”

Igarashi-senpai was silent.

“That day, you went up to the school roof in the middle of the night. And then you put together that monument.”

Right now, the monument would have been moved to the center of the schoolyard.

“The parts for the monument were made in the fourth floor Science Preparation Room which usually goes unused. It wouldn’t have been difficult to move the parts from there to the rooftop. Also, according to Seno-senpai’s design, the materials used were much lighter than last year’s, so with a little time, you were able to put it all together even on your own.”

And so, you put together that huge monument on the roof in the middle of the night.

That sounds about right so far, correct?

I gave Igarashi-senpai a look that suggested these words, and he nodded slightly.

“It’s as you said, mostly. To be accurate, I wasn’t the only one that went up to the roof that night. I thought it might be hard to put it together all on my own, so I asked someone to help me.”

“And that would’ve been Seno-senpai, right?”

“Yeah. We’ve been good friends since we were kids. I approached him, saying that if we could display that record-high work that he made, up on the roof in one night, our names would go down in Akebi High history.”

“But if you tried to pull something like that on your own, the school officials wouldn’t just let that go quietly. Even though the monument itself could be banned altogether, I’m surprised that Seno-senpai still agreed to that plan.”

“I told him that the teacher responsible for the monument construction were secretly in on it as well. That I’d had it all taken care of.”

By teacher, he must have meant the “Sword Fodder” one.

“Seno loves things that are interesting and stand out, so he was on board right away.”

This was what Seno-senpai had meant when he offhandedly mentioned a “dramatic presentation.”

“However, the truth is, you never said anything to the teacher. Igarashi-senpai, you lied to him. Am I wrong?”

“...No, you’re exactly right.”

And without knowing of Igarashi-senpai’s real objective, Seno-senpai had helped him.

“After we praised each other’s good work on putting together the monument that night, we hurried home before daybreak. We wanted to get some rest, even if only for an hour or two.”

“The following morning, you came to the school earlier than anyone else, for the sake of staging the monument’s end... right?”

That was the true plan that Igarashi-senpai had come up with.

“Yeah. I thought I’d barricade myself on the roof while I waited for the other students to arrive, and once I felt that I’d gathered enough attention, I would set fire to the monument right then and there, without waiting until the second day of the Akebi Festival.”

I see; putting together that towering monument had been a feasible task, and furthermore, the highest place in the school where he could isolate it was the roof.

“You wanted to end it with your own hands, didn’t you?”

As Igarashi-senpai hesitated to say his true intentions aloud, I quietly spoke them in his place.

He looked up the sky for a little while, as if waiting for the waves of his emotions to pass, and then finally opened his mouth again.

“That’s right. I wanted to be the one to stage the monument’s end.”

Putting together the ten-meter tall monument on the roof in secret from the school officials, and then setting fire to it—carrying out such a dangerous act would put an end the history of the monument. That had been his true objective all along.

“I’m graduating next year. So that’s why I wanted to settle it before I leave this school. I didn’t want it to end naturally, through voluntary restraint, but to erase the monument construction from the Akebi Festival entirely, with my own hands.”

Igarashi-senpai wasn’t looking at the sky anymore. He was now looking at his hands with eyes full of emotions that were difficult to put into words.

“Was it all for your sister’s sake?”

“—You even know that much, do you... Just who are you, exactly?”

For the first time, Igarashi-senpai looked directly at me.

“I heard from Seno-senpai that the one who was injured in last year’s accident was Igarashi-senpai’s younger sister. Correct me if I’m wrong, but was your sister....”

I hesitated with my next words, but I wound up saying them in the end.

“Did she suffer a wound from her left cheek to her ear?”

“Even now, she still has a scar.”

It was a clearly positive answer.

“Last year, I took my sister by the hand and guided her around the culture festival. She’s always been rather shy, and rarely expresses her emotions, but that day, she actually smiled a lot for once. In the afternoon, we went to look at the monument together. And then, a sudden wind blew. An unexpected gust of wind toppled the monument, and it came falling down towards my sister and I.....”

“Hurry, hurry!” A pair of girls ran past us and towards the schoolyard while holding hands with each other.

“At that time, I separated from her. The moment I tried to get away, I let go of her hand.”

He must have watched it unfold right in front of his eyes. His own sister, in terrible pain.

"You developed a hatred for the monument, as well as the Akebi Festival, that gave your sister such a serious wound on her face..."

"It wasn't only her face. I'm sure that she suffered mental and emotional trauma, as well. But, I don't know... if I did what I did that night on the roof out of hatred towards the Akebi Festival, or because I was trying to escape the anger I felt towards myself for letting go of her hand....."

There was an exceptionally loud cheer from the schoolyard. The monument had been brought to its assigned position. Looking at it from such a distance, it looked so small.

"But, that night, you went home, but then came straight back to the school again, didn't you? And then you hurried to take down the monument that you'd just worked so hard to construct."

"I'd forgotten my jacket on the roof and gone straight home. It started to get hot as we were putting the monument together, so I took it off, but since I was so tired both mentally and physically afterwards, I forgot all about picking it back up. I didn't realize it until I reached the front door of my house, and rushed back to go get it. I think this was sometime after 3 AM."

After he'd run back up to the roof, short of breath and with a flashlight in hand, an unbelievable scene met his eyes.

A female student was collapsed underneath the monument, bleeding heavily.

"At first, I couldn't figure out what had happened. I thought it might've been a ghost, you know? But eventually, I realized that she'd fallen from the monument. Although I had no idea what a girl was doing there on the roof at such a late hour—"

Even Igarashi-senpai had been able to figure out that she had climbed the monument, and then fallen down by accident.

"You were actually the first one to find her, then."

"She was bleeding... A lot. And she was lying so still, I thought she might already be dead. I was probably too shocked to think straight at the time. After that, I hurried to take the monument down."

"And isn't that when you injured your left hand?"

Today, as well, there were bandages wrapped around his left hand.

"Yeah. In any case, I was in a rush, and I pushed myself too hard."

Because of the sudden and unexpected visitor, Igarashi-senpai had no longer been able to carry out his initial plan.

"I got scared, and ran away from the school. But on the way home, there was a police box, and for a while, I just stood there, thinking. But I didn't know how I could explain it..... They'd probably just think I was crazy if I told them that a girl had fallen to her death on the roof. But if I tried to explain it properly, I'd have to tell them everything about my plan. And in doing so, Seno would get involved, as well.... I ended up going home without doing anything."

Clearly, Igarashi-senpai hadn't been able to sleep a wink that night. It'd been obvious from his haggard appearance and bloodshot eyes the following morning.

"When I heard you say that Amemura-san was alright, I was so relieved.... I felt like I could collapse right then and there, simply from knowing the fact that she was alive....."

Back then, maybe he had been rubbing his eyes because he'd really started to cry, and not because he was lacking

sleep.

"I knew that I would have to atone for my sins before long. I'm certain that once Amemura-san wakes up, she'll call me out as being inhumane for leaving her behind, and everything will be brought to light,"

That was what Igarashi-senpai said, but I had something else in mind. However, even if I told him about that now, I wouldn't be able to convey it well enough.

"But, how did you figure out that I snuck into the school that night? Tell me that, at least."

"Because of what you said about the radio. Senpai, you said that you'd been at home listening to that radio program all night."

"Radio program? Ah, right, S-Edition Hour."

"You also said that they were playing many familiar songs, as usual."

"...I suppose I did."

"When I first heard that, I had no way of knowing whether or not that was true, because I'd fallen asleep without listening to the entire program. However, someone close to me also listened to the same program, and he told me that there was a rare incident during the broadcast that night."

Or so I said, but when I had heard about the broadcast incident from Kareshima-san, I still had yet to notice the contradiction with Igarashi-senpai's story.

His relationship with Seno-senpai, his sister, and the conflicting stories. When I tried seeing the monument as being the center of all these events, everything about Igarashi-senpai and all that he'd said come flooding back as the key to solve the mystery.

"So my alibi fell apart because of the radio show, huh? Looks like my tongue slipped."

He shook his head with a light scoff.

"In the end, I couldn't accomplish anything. All I did was leave things unfinished. I couldn't help Amemura-san, or even carry out my initial plan. Without being able to make up my mind about anything, I acted as the President of the Akebi Festival Executive Committee. I couldn't even take revenge for my sister's injury....."

"...Senpai, have you met with your sister today?"

"No... She should be at home right now. Why do you ask?"

"I think your sister has likely already gotten over her injury. At the very least, I think that she's come to terms with it in her own way."

"No, she couldn't have....."

"Earlier, I saw someone that looked like it could have been your sister. She's here. Without even hiding the scar on her face, she came to see the festival that her older brother has organized. Don't you think that this is her way of showing how she feels?"

If she had wanted to hide the scar, she could have worn a mask. And she wouldn't have set foot in the grounds of the Akebi Festival again if her feelings hadn't been in order.

That was what I believed.

"But still... As her brother, I wasn't able to overcome it. The only way in which I could settle my feelings was to carry about a plan that was understood by no one, that I could tell no one about."

He said that no one had understood his plan, but I felt that wasn't quite correct.

"There was someone that understood, wasn't there? Just one person."

"Was there? But, I didn't talk about it to anyone.... No, it can't be....."

"Yes. It was Saho. I think that Saho probably went up to the roof that night because she knew that you were there."

"But why....? For what purpose?!"

Igarashi-senpai pressed me for an answer, his face indicating that he truly did not understand.

"You really don't get it?"

I said, letting myself be driven by the irritation that rose up from the pits of my stomach.

"If that's the case, go to the monument right now, and climb up to the very top! I'm certain that everything will make sense once you do."

"The very top....? Is it something to do with the heart symbol.....?"

"Please go see it for yourself."

"But.... I....."

"Hurry up! It's going to be burned down by tomorrow, you know!"

I shouted at him in anger, and took off running in the direction of the monument. Teachers stared blankly up at the heart, and guests were engrossed in taking pictures. Many of the students had quickly grown bored, and started chatting amongst themselves. I pushed my way past everyone, and by the time I'd finally made it to the foot of the monument, I was a bit short of breath.

"Hey! What do you think you're doing!"

The PE teacher who was standing nearby, "Sword Fodder," tried to stop me once he'd spotted me. I leapt up onto the monument before I was caught.

"Sorry, but there's something important that I need to pick up!"

I placed my feet on the bamboo framework and steadily climbed upwards. The entire monument rattled and swayed. It was swaying much more than I had imagined it would.

For a moment, my legs froze, but I tried not to look down and kept on climbing.

A wind blew in the schoolyard, the same as last year. However, I trusted that the monument wouldn't fall this year, and continued to climb.

Below, I could hear shouts of anger from the teachers, and screams from parents.

Although they didn't know the situation at hand, because it looked interesting, the students that were gathered starting chanting things like, "Climb, climb—!"

"Hanamoto-san!"

I could hear Igarashi-senpai's voice from below me. Good. He'd followed me here like he was supposed to.

The top of the monument had felt very far off, but at last, I eventually climbed high enough to reach my hand into the heart symbol.

"This is it!"

I immediately found the small hole that had been noticed only just after the monument had been completed. I stuck my hand through the hole without a moment of hesitation.

It has to be in here! It has to be!

As I repeated these words to myself like a prayer, I searched inside.

And upon doing so, something touched the tips of my fingers. The texture of it felt just like what I was expecting.

I carefully wrapped my fingers around it and pulled my hand out.

"I found it, Senpai! Here, look!"

I raised the letter that I'd pulled out. In small print were the words, "To Igarashi-senpai."

"It's just like I said—..... Ah—"

It was then that I returned to my senses.

So high up——

Looking down from the top of the monument, the people on the ground looked tiny.

Saho had climbed to such great heights, relying only on moonlight.

My legs shook.

Right now, I had to climb back down the monument, with the letter in hand. But, would I be able to—?

And then, a strong wind blew, bringing dust into my eyes.

"Ah—!"

In the next instant, I lost my footing. As if it didn't belong to me at all, my body fell head over heels. How stupid of me.

As I watched the ground draw nearer, those were the only words that passed through my mind. I didn't even see my life flash before my eyes—what a dull ending.

Sensei——

And then, I hit the ground.

Or at least, I should have.

I really... should have... but strangely, the ground felt soft, and warm.

"I advise you start eating better. You're much too light."

Very slowly, I opened my eyes and saw the author's face right in front of me.

I was being held within his arms.

“Seems like I made it in time.”

“S-Sensei.....!”

“You are not guilty of any sin. Which is why you won’t receive divine punishment. No matter how many times you are thrown down for recklessly approaching heaven, I will be there to catch you each time.That is, only if my hands are free, and I have nothing better to do.”

“That last part was unnecessary.”

“Was it?” The author laughed. Up until then, it had been so quiet that you could hear a pin drop, but as soon as he laughed, the schoolyard erupted in cheers.

My hand was still tightly holding onto the letter. I wanted to praise my own hand for not releasing it this entire time.

“Hibari-chan! Waaah! I was so worrieeed!”

Pushing her way through the crowd, Yue appeared. No sooner, she’d buried her face into my chest and started bawling. She’d started crying while still wearing her Kerakera Onna costume.

“Yue-chan, you’ve turned into the Mesomeso Onna (“sobbing woman”).”

“Waaaah! You fool—! Hibari-chan, you’re so heartless! Bakenekooo—!”

“Don’t pull a stunt like that ever again. I thought my heart was gonna stop.”

Touka also appeared soon after. She stood on tiptoe to pat me on the head.

“And don’t worry. No one saw your underwear.”

With my heart still pounding, I stood in front of Igarashi-senpai, who had been watching from beginning to end.

“What a relief... If you’d also ended up like Amemura-san because of me.....”

As he made a grasping motion at his chest, I held out the letter to him.

“Here. These are the feelings of the girl named Amemura Saho.”

“A letter.....”

Igarashi-senpai took it with shaking hands, and slowly opened it.

He read through the contents in silence, and before long, he started to cry.

*

“Looks like you went through a lot yesterday. But, I’m glad that you weren’t hurt in the end.”

On the afternoon of the second day of the Akebi Festival, Kareshima-san came to visit the Youkai Jazz Cafe.

“It’s been a long time since I went straight home and fell asleep right after. I guess I overworked both my mind and body yesterday.”

Even in a place like this, Kareshima-san still wore his usual kimono. I would have expected no less from him.

On the other hand, it was more like his appearance fit all too well with a Youkai Jazz Cafe.

"You make a cute bakeneko. And this is exactly why helping out was worth it,"

Kareshima-san said, and patted me on the head. Yes, to tell the truth, although we'd come up with the idea of this bizarre cafe, the one that had provided the reference materials on youkai had been none other than Kareshima-san. In fact, he'd been so enthusiastic about it that he'd even gone so far as to choose the role for each of my classmates.

If he hadn't, everyone would have chosen youkai that most people normally wouldn't be familiar with, like Kejourou and Tenjou-kudari.

"You seem like you're in a good mood today, Hibari-chan."

"That's because I slept soundly all night, and for breakfast, I stuffed myself so full, you wouldn't think I was still just a young girl!"

However, those weren't the only reasons.

Apparently, Saho had regained consciousness in the hospital this morning. She still needed a few more days of bedrest, but since there weren't any indications of lasting aftereffects, I couldn't be happier right now.

Once things had settled down a bit, I wanted to go visit her with Touka and Yue.

"Um.... By the way.... Um, well..."

Seeing me suddenly start to fidget restlessly, Kareshima-san broke into a smile.

"He came by again today, you know."

As expected, he really was sensitive to what people wanted to say.

"He said that because of how hectic yesterday was, there was something he forgot to go see."

"Something he forgot to...? Oh, Sensei... No matter what he says, he really is enjoying the festival, isn't he?"

A man stood still at that place, ignoring the steady flow of people. Female students and women stared listlessly at him, as if they were gazing upon a beautiful mirage.

Here in the art room, the paintings by the club members were displayed at reasonable intervals from one another.

In front of the man, Kudou, was a single painting that was not very large, by any means.

In the painting was a man sitting in a chair and reading a book, depicted from the rear view. For the most part, it was void of color. Only soft, milky white hues subtly adorned the piece.

The title was,

"Sunlight, Or Perhaps a Reassuring Scene / by Hanamoto Hibari"

Kudou's signature devilish grin spread on his face.

"Hmph, what a mundane representation,"

Contrary to those words, his tone of voice sounded unusually chipper.

*

To Igarashi-senpai

Hello, it's nice to meet you.

In reality, it isn't our first time meeting, but if I were to look at it from Senpai's point of view, then I'm sure that it would be correct to say that.

Forgive me for saying this so suddenly, but at the moment, I feel very strange. Hmm, I suppose you could say that I feel uplifted. In any case, I currently find myself in a very peculiar mental state.

Please do not be alarmed, but just now, I've followed after you and snuck into the school in the middle of the night. Naturally, I'm alone.

I am writing this letter on the stair landing by moonlight. Therefore, please forgive me if my handwriting is a bit difficult to read.

Still, for me to be doing something like this now, I have to say that it's very out of character for me. If my normal life were to be viewed as a room, it's like stepping outside through a door I've never opened before. I suppose you would call this being tempted by an evil spirit?

But, it really is like my body moved against my own will. For instance, have you ever played in a sandbox?

It's like when you can't resist the impulse to kick down a sand castle, even after you spent so much time to build it in the first place.

Hm? Or perhaps it's a little different? I suppose that's not a very good example, is it?

Now then, to be frank, I know what you and Seno-senpai are planning. The plan where you intend to surprise everyone tomorrow morning by constructing the monument on the roof. It was really only by chance, but I overheard the two of you talking about it after school last Wednesday, between the dusty bookshelves in a corner of the library. About how you secretly discussed it with the teacher, and about how you would be carrying out the plan tonight. I found myself feeling anxious every day since hearing that conversation, and wasn't able to sleep at night, either. And every night, I wondered why I felt so unsettled.

Was it because I had found out that my senior, the president of the Akebi Festival Executive Committee, had organized such an unprecedented plan?

Or was it because I started to feel, on my own accord, like I was like an accomplice in keeping the same secret, although I had only happened to hear it?

I wasn't able to come up with a definite answer.

However, I will say this. It isn't because I felt that I had to stop your plan that I decided to wait behind the school building for you to come so late at night, and even follow after you inside the building.

To tell the truth, at first I thought that it might be best if I talked you out of doing this. But when I really thought it through, I realized I didn't have any concrete reason to do so.

Just so there aren't any misunderstandings, it also isn't my intention to admit that I overheard your plan, and say that I will help with it. Having a girl interfere in something strictly between boys would just spoil things, wouldn't it?

Right about now, I would assume that you've gone up to the roof with Seno-senpai to quickly set up the monument. For the sake of tomorrow's unveiling.

At least, that's what Seno-senpai believes, correct?

However, you have another objective, Igarashi-senpai. That is what I think.

What led to me this conclusion was a very slight inconsistency.

Despite the fact that your younger sister was injured so terribly because of last year's monument falling over, it's strange that you would go so far as to break the tradition, and unveil the monument in such a grand manner before the actual Akebi Festival.

Perhaps, I thought, Senpai actually wanted to get rid of the monument, and the annual monument-constructing event, at least for this year? In reality, isn't it that this plan hadn't been discussed with the teacher at all, and building the monument on the roof was actually for the purpose of abolishing it? Is that Senpai's actual goal? I thought to myself.

Come to think of it, you volunteered to be put on the Executive Committee, and stopped the budget cut for the monument quite early on, didn't you? Was that to prevent the monument from being abolished by voluntary restraint —?

Of course, this is only my personal take on the matter. Forgive me if I was incorrect.

But, having thought about it to this point, I wouldn't think of stopping you now.

I know very well about the accident last year. Or rather, I was close to being one of those that were involved in it.

The truth is, I was standing nearby when the monument fell. To be more precise, I would have been right below it the moment hit the ground. However, I came out unharmed. Someone pushed me out of the way mere seconds before it collapsed on me.

Igarashi-senpai. That someone was you.

I think that you must have forgotten it by now. It happened so quickly, after all, and immediately after the accident, everyone was in a state of panic. And moreover, I'm sure that you would have been too preoccupied with your sister being injured.

Yes, your sister, who had suffered in my place.....

I'm sorry. I had to open the window in the hallway to get some fresh air. Let me continue now.

Ever since that day, you've been constantly on my mind, together with the vivid articles of the accident.

Senpai, why did you save me that day? No, that's a cruel question, isn't it? I'm sure that it was because your body moved instinctively. I think that you're the type of person who would instinctively save whoever that was right in front of you.

That's what made me start liking you. That's why I could never take my eyes off of you.

Finally! After beating around the bush for so many pages, I've finally gotten to the point! Really, how much of a coward am I?

Allow me to write it once more.

Senpai, I like you.

In truth, I only came here tonight to tell you this.

But since Seno-senpai is also here today, I've calmed down enough to overcome that impulse and instead write down my feelings in a letter with no recipient. I really am a coward.

Still, I think it's really something amazing that I would lie to my parents and sneak out of the house just to come here. I doubt that anyone would praise me for doing this, so at the very least, I want to praise my

I'm sorry for stopping midway again. I heard you and Seno-senpai coming down the stairs, so I hurried to hide in the bathroom until the two of you were gone.

Even though I'm at school during the night, strangely, I don't feel scared at all. Is it because I'm so focused on writing this letter?

On the contrary, without the classmates who laugh and find joy in my sadness and frustration around, the school at night feels strangely comforting.

Incidentally, I've now gone up to the roof and am writing this letter while, of course, looking up at the monument that the two of you have built.

I was surprised. It looks tall enough to reach the heavens. Like the Tower of Babel.

Senpai, going back to what I said at the beginning, I feel very strange right now. Please don't be alarmed at what I'm about to say.

I suddenly feel like climbing up this tower.

I can't believe it either. How could I seriously be thinking of climbing it when I've always been so poor at climbing trees, and would be laughed at by everyone for being slow?

But, I suddenly feel like I simply have to see what the view from the top of this tower is like.

That's why, even though I'm scared, I will try to climb it. It's so nice with the moon out, after all, and since there's no one else at school right now, it's fine to do something a little out of character, isn't it?

You must be back home right about now. I'm sure I'll be able to see where your house is from the top (the truth is, I've actually written several letters like this and thought of putting it in the mailbox of your house, but I never had the courage to).

If I see the light of your room on, I might just start crying and waving my hand. Even though I know there's no point in doing something like that.

Ah, I know. I'll hide this letter inside of that huge heart. And then it can burn up together with the monument. Yes, that would be good.

And if I am to slip up and fall from the top afterwards, then that will be my punishment, I think. For wanting to seal off my feelings for you and set fire to them, a punishment(X) from God.

It won't do to keep rambling on any more than this, so I'll be ending it here.

Now then, please excuse me, but I'll be heading up for a bit.

From Amemura Saho

*

The Akebi Festival ended without further incident.

The monument was engulfed by the flames all too soon, the sparks dancing up towards the evening sky like fireflies.

"I'm thinking of going to the hospital. I'll do what I can for her. I'll atone for my sins, in whatever way she wishes me to,"

Igarashi-senpai said, and left without taking part in the festival's after party.

From here on, it was an issue between the two of them. If they were honest about their feelings, then things would surely work out.

As I got off the streetcar at the usual station, and was walking down the sidewalk deep in thought, the author came out of a nearby bookstore.

"What, you're only just now heading home? Even with the street lights on, is it really wise for a girl to be out at night by herself?"

"I had to stay behind to clean up, so it can't be helped. Anyway, aren't you the one who left first without me?"

"I'm a very busy man."

"And yet you still have the time to bully me and drink coffee."

"You insolent..... No, it's fine. I'll overlook it for today, and spare your life."

"You can't go taking someone's life no matter what day it is."

"More importantly, come to my home immediately."

The author grabbed my hand with an unusual firmness.

"Wh-what's the matter?"

I asked him with my heart pounding.

"I haven't had any proper coffee to drink for two whole days. That's why you are to come and make me some immediately. I can't concentrate on my work without it,"

As soon as he said this, the author began walking briskly while pulling my hand.

Come to think of it, the only coffee he'd had at school was the instant kind, and I hadn't visited his house yesterday, either.

He'd been waiting without drinking any coffee this whole time.

"Because Sensei can't drink any coffee but mine, huh?"

I muttered, but he didn't seem to hear me.

Well of course he didn't. Because I hadn't said it loud enough for him to hear.

Before crossing the street to the other side, for a while, we stood side by side, waiting for the cars to pass.

As we waited, the author opened his mouth to say something.

"That letter you found in the monument must have had some rather terrible things written in it. It was quite pleasant to see him cast away all shame and reputation and burst into tears!"

My eyes widened like marbles as I stared at him. I didn't have the energy to shut my mouth that hung agape, either.

"I-I don't believe it! You didn't understand anything at all! You're the worst!"

"What did you say?!"

"I'm saying that you don't understand the delicacies of a maiden's heart! This is exactly why your books won't sell!"

"Why, you coffee bean girl youkai! If I had my way with words—!"

"What's with that weird nickname!"

"Come now, we're crossing!"

Still sounding annoyed, the author pulled me along forcefully. It was like we were crossing a wide, deep river together.

A warm wind rustled the roadside trees.

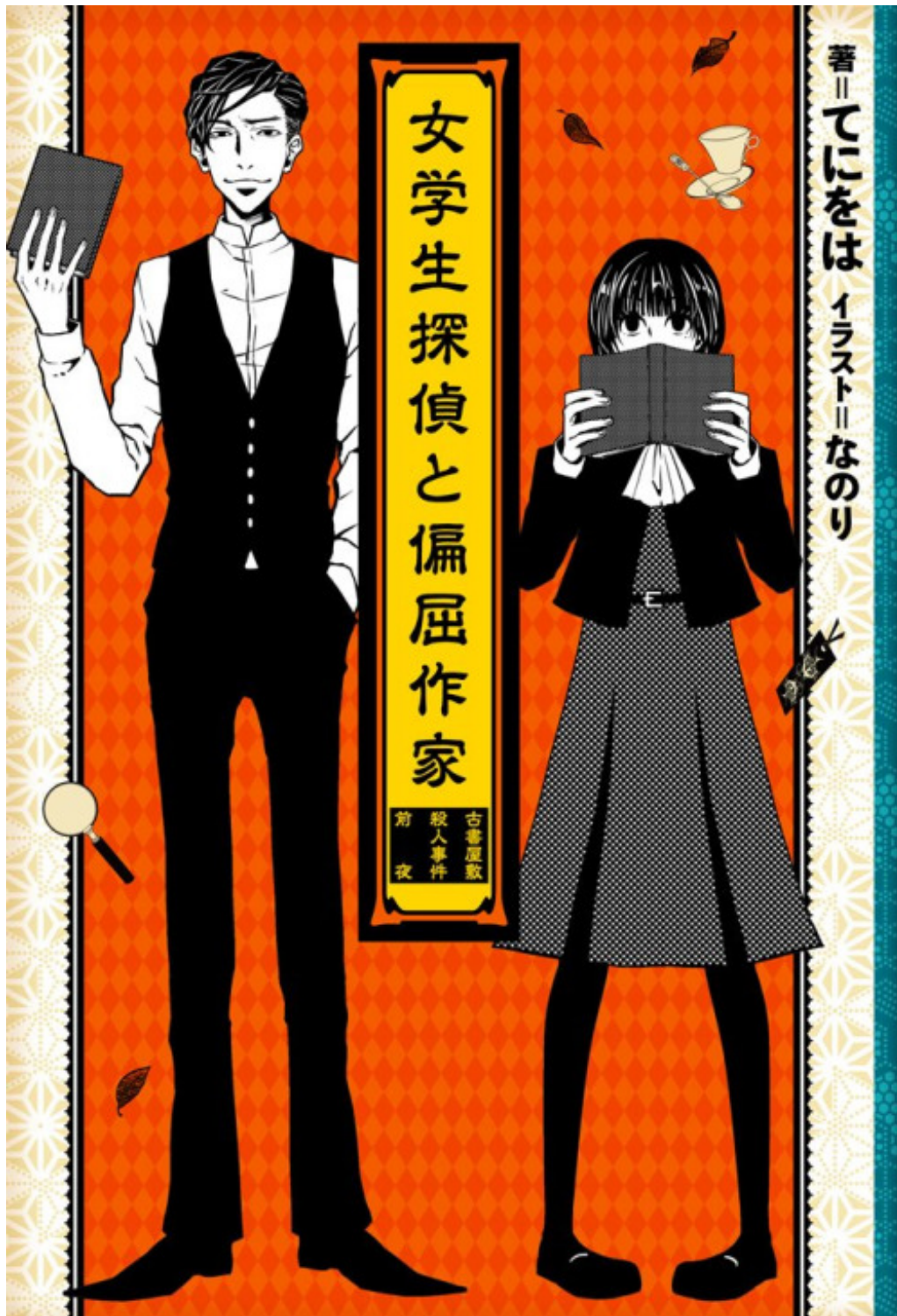
The author was on the left. I was on the right. We walked in our usual order.

Now then, I suppose I'd brew some nice coffee for him today.

"There's only one kind of letter that a girl would put so much thought into writing."

".....Ahh, I know now—"

"Sensei, don't spoil everything!"



Teniwoha's novel for his Schoolgirl Detective Series, "**The Schoolgirl Detective and Eccentric Author – Night Before The Murder Case at the Mansion of Antiquarian Books,**" acts as a prequel to the first song in the series, "Murder Case at the Mansion of Antiquarian Books," and follows the events between the schoolgirl detective who loves mystery novels, Hanamoto Hibari, and the extremely sadistic mystery novel writer, Kudou Renma.

The second part in this three-part novel is called: *Detective Time-Killing Game*.

*Under strange circumstances, Hibari becomes involved in a game with Kudou.
After being given three clues by Kudou, she is to select the correct book from the huge collection he
has in his home....*

Masterpost with links to all the translated chapters can be found [here](#).

[←Pt.1, Ch.3](#) | [Pt.3 Ch.1→](#)

* If you can, I highly encourage supporting the creators by buying the book for yourself at [Amazon!](#) (also, I most likely won't be scanning the illustrations, so if you'd like to see them, there's another reason to buy it)

—

× day in the month of ○.

That day, Hanamoto Hibari was furious.

At her teacher, and this country's education administration——

If I were a novelist, that was probably how I would write out my feelings at the moment.

Today at school, I had my modern Japanese class. Just like how it was with every subject, the classroom was filled with a somewhat drowsy atmosphere throughout the lesson, and ended without anything particularly remarkable happening. We, as students, simply bowed to the teacher when the lesson was over, and then were simply seated again. The teacher, as well, simply gathered up the course materials as usual and made to leave the classroom.

It was at that moment that I quickly stepped forward and called out to the teacher. And as he slowly turned around, I asked him,

"Why doesn't the textbook have any mystery or detective novels in them?"

Tougan-sensei, the teacher in charge of teaching modern Japanese, looked bewildered at first, as if a slug had suddenly been sprinkled with a seven-flavored spice. He then scratched his head with an annoyed expression on his face. He was in his late thirties. I assumed he must have lost the passion he'd had when he'd first started teaching, because he looked positively unhappy whenever students asked him about something unrelated to the lesson.

All my classmates had already closed their textbooks and left their seats to start chatting with each other. No one was paying attention to my conversation with Tougan-sensei.

"I believe that there are many beautiful works to be found in the mystery genre, and they deserve to be passed down and read by many people. So why aren't they included at all?"

This was something that had bothered me since I was little. Fluid sentences, letters that overflowed with clever psychological depiction, concise and vivid words—of course, I also enjoyed beautiful poems that were woven from those things. There was much to be learned from them. However, why was it that mystery novels were never featured at all?

"Why? Well, obviously, it's because it'd be problematic."

Tougan-san spoke with deliberate pauses between his words. To me, it sounded like he was trying to think up reasons as he spoke.

"Problematic for whom?"

“For both the students and the teachers, of course. Why do you think classic novels and essays are mentioned in the textbook? It’s so that we can learn from them, right? So that you can practice deriving the meaning behind the psychological descriptions of the characters, and learn the complexity and beauty of the Japanese language through examining its structure, right? That’s what the modern Japanese textbooks are for. If things like mystery and detective novels were put in there, that would be problematic for you as a student, wouldn’t it?”

“So in other words, do you mean to say that there’s nothing to learn from mystery novels?”

“Of course. After all, they’re for leisure reading. Just something to entertain the masses. Something that kids read for fun. They’re little more than a game where you solve riddles to find out who the culprit is while imagining what the ending might be. The characters are introduced only for the sake of being killed, and the story progresses only for the sake of solving the riddles and tricks. Any detailed psychological depictions are put aside, and deep themes that investigate history or important figures simply don’t exist. What could you possibly learn from them?”

For a moment, it felt like the chatter of the classroom had suddenly gone far away. A raging anger started welling up inside of me. His casual, and somewhat condescending way of talking was the same as usual, but for some strange reason, it bothered me.

“And even if they were included in the textbook, it would only be an excerpt. There’s no point in putting in only a part of a mystery novel. You wouldn’t be able to find out who the culprit is, right? Tests would be too hard if the question was something like, ‘Figure out the culprit by reading the following passage,’ right?”

“Excuse me if I’m being rude but, Tougan-sensei, you haven’t read a single mystery novels, have you?”

Before I could help it, I had raised my voice a little.

“What did you say?”

Tougan-sensei also raised his voice, as if to compete with my volume.

At this point, everyone in the classroom seemed to notice something was off, and like spontaneous evening showers, their conversations gradually ceased.

“Mystery novels only consist of ‘riddles,’ and completely ignore psychological depictions, themes, and everything else. That’s what you believe, correct?”

“Y-yeah, that’s right. And to top it all off, the wording of the sentences and the content are usually all written in bad taste. The tricks, which are its only selling point, rarely ever make sense realistically. Laughable, isn’t it!”

“That isn’t true!”

“If you ask me, mystery writers are just a socially inept lot with unnecessarily bizarre tastes!”

“Take back what you just said——!”

“Hibari, I’m going to the restroom, so come along with me——!”

Just as as I was about to yell at a teacher without any thought of the consequences, Touka-chan aggressively took me by the arm and before I could protest, pulled me out into the hallway.

“Sensei, thank you for your instruction today,”

She quickly said to Tougan-sensei, before pushing me along from behind as she walked off. As I’d expect from someone in the Judo Club, she was strong. No matter how firmly I planted my feet on the ground, she had no trouble pushing me along. In the end, she wound up taking me all the way to the restroom.

"Touka-chan, why did you stop me?! Did you hate that rumor about being called Akebi High School's mini-Godzilla that much?"

"You idiot, do you really need to ask? What were you planning to say to a teacher looking that angry? Also, I'll have you tell me all about this 'Godzilla' thing afterwards, you hear?!"

"That's.... For the sake of the honor of all detective and mystery writers, I was prepared to die a heroic death in battle!"

"Don't go dying in battle in the middle of the classroom during an otherwise peaceful break time."

"But.... But....!"

I was frustrated. And also saddened. I felt overwhelmed when I thought about how even the teacher for modern Japanese felt that way about mystery novels. Were all the works that I loved really such childish and unnecessary things?

"I was listening in the background, so I heard everything. It was Tougan's fault for wording things so badly. That wasn't how a teacher should have acted as a role model to the students. He'll be single for life if he keeps acting like that. He deserves to live a life as bland as his name."

"Touka-chan...."

"So um, cheer up, alright?"

She said, and pulled on my pigtail braids out of embarrassment.

"Touka-chan, you're so cool. Even though you're this tiny."

"Shut up! Let me just say that you're on the small side too, you know! Same goes for your chest!"

"Aaagh! Touka-chan's verbal abuse—!"

I already know that, so you don't have to say it!

"After that, I went with the flow and tried hugging Touka-chan, but I was thrown straight through the air."

"How pleasant."

Angered under those circumstances, I had visited the house of the mystery writer, Kudou-sensei, and fervently told him about what had happened today.

I was furious. No, even at the time, I was still furious. Not about what had been said about my chest, but about the opinion and treatment that everyone, including my teacher, had towards mystery novels. I wasn't furious because of my chest in the slightest.

However, despite how desperately I had been trying to express my wrath and frustration, the only thing that the author kept saying was, "How pleasant." He sat comfortably in his office sofa with his arms folded aloft, and was indulging in the cup of coffee that I had made.

"Are you even listening? He was making fun of mystery writers! Isn't that horrible?"

"It's just as that teacher said."

"*Wuh?*"

Hearing these unexpected words from Kudou-sensei, I made a strange sound, like a dog might make in their sleep.

“It’s a fact that mystery novels are written to be read for entertainment, and when riddles are the main focus, any psychological depictions are often kept brief. It’s also a fact that most of the topics covered are generally seen as bad taste.”

“Th-that can’t be...!”

I had been convinced that he’d definitely take my side this time, but seeing that I’d made a grave miscalculation, my shoulders slumped heavily in disappointment. Didn’t he feel at all frustrated to have his occupation criticized like that?

“Don’t take me the wrong way. I don’t write for the sake of critics who try and make a name for themselves by beating down other’s works, or for people like that modern Japanese teacher called Nigauri or whatever his name may be. It would only fill me with dread if I were to be glorified by such people as they rub their hands together and praise me with, ‘Each and every page of your work is equally sensible and harmless. It’s perfect reading material for the youths that will shoulder this country in the future!’ or similar flattery. What significance does a colorless and transparent mystery novel even have without a single drop of venom? Just try and come up with an answer using that sponge melon head of yours.”

“The modern Japanese teacher’s name isn’t Nigauri, and my head’s not a sponge, either!”

“Oh? What’s this, inflating your cheeks like a department store ad balloon? You look more like a watermelon now. Keep on inflating them like that then, and fly off to Ginza.”

There was no love! Touka-chan’s verbal abuse had love in it, but there was no love in this person’s words at all!

“Mystery novels aren’t the type of works to be placed in glass display cases and admired for how refined or tasteful they are. They are to be read by adolescent boys as they hold back feelings of guilt, relying on lamplight to illuminate the pages in the dead of the night. The purpose of mystery novels is to allow those boys to remember how fast their hearts were beating in that moment. The true thrill of mystery novels is the dark pleasure that they bring.”

While unbelievable, it was impressive that he could apply logic to things so fluently like this even without any real evidence to back it up.

“Those that want to be showered in praise and held in such high regard should simply write literature. Works that center around timeless, humanistic themes that can’t be taken at face value, such as human love, discrimination, and war. I, for one, care little for themes, and write novels purely for the sake of the story. I write stories that will leave intense scars on the readers’ hearts, and their soft, fair skin that has not yet been touched by another. I don’t need the indulgence of those ‘high and mighty themes’ or what have you. What sways the readers’ is a riveting story that no one has ever told before, and that is what I believe to be true salvation for the readers’ soul.”

It was hopeless. He was completely unapproachable, like an island in the middle of nowhere with no ferries to take you there. I was mistaken in thinking that this arrogant mystery writer, Kudou Renma, would understand the frustration and sadness that I had felt.

This man is completely unconcerned with the assessment and common sense of the world, and immerses himself only in writing his stories. If I do this, I’ll sell. If I do that, my reputation will go up. With blatant disregard to any of those things, he wrote mystery novels based entirely on his own judgement.

Whether or not he was mentioned in a school textbook was a matter as unimportant to him as a cat fight happening on the other side of the world.

“If you included miso soup in a full course meal of French cuisine, very few would appreciate it. However, it is not

because the miso soup tastes worse than French cuisine. Miso soup is delicious.”

“It really is delicious!”

“Yes, delicious. But the miso soup that you make is a bit bland!”

“That has nothing to do with this conversation!”

“In other words, no matter how good it is, if the time or place is wrong, no one will be happy. Nothing good will come out of forcing something somewhere it doesn’t belong.”

Of course, I also wasn’t so concerned with whether or not mystery novels would be included in textbooks. I was more irritated by the fact that everyone thought they were nothing but entertainment, and nothing could be learned from them.

“I just couldn’t stand to see mystery novels being looked down on as absurd nonsense. It made me start to wonder if everything that’s moved and surprised me up until now have all been something vulgar.”

There’s no way it could be. That’s what I wanted to believe.

“When it comes down to it, whether something is vulgar or not changes with the times. More importantly, what’s wrong with nonsense? What’s so bad about dreaming? Who ever said that reality must always triumph over something else?”

“W-well....”

The author stood up from the sofa and began to slowly walk around the study. As he looked at me when I unintentionally stammered, it seemed he was starting to take interest in the topic.

“Reality is always what is considered just and valuable, and though you seem to hold resentment towards those realists who regard mystery novels as something written in poor taste, it defeats the purpose to try and bring nonsense closer to reality. Authors such as I write nonsense day and night in order to reveal things that cannot be witnessed in reality,”

The author said and leaned against the desk, staring over at the wall-to-wall bookshelves with eyes that seemed to be gazing at something far away.

“Everything has its own form of domain. It’s pointless to try and argue which is superior and which is inferior.”

“But there are people who have never looked at things that way, and you’re fine with being unfairly held in low esteem by them?”

“Didn’t I say before? The worth of something changes with the times. It’s a waste of time to be making a fuss over a temporary assessment.”

“...You don’t care even if people don’t praise you?”

“I don’t want to be praised for writing stories. All I want is that the stories I’ve written to not be forgotten,”

The author said, and suddenly dropped his gaze to the drawer of his desk. In it was the manuscript for his new work. That gaze made my heart beat faster and sweat run down my back.

“Sensei, aren’t you thirsty from talking so much? Should I make you some coff—”

I started to say, but the author suddenly took a step back from the desk in a hurried fashion. Then, in one swift

movement, he opened the drawer and took out the manuscript that he had written.

“What’s the matter?”

I said to him, but he didn’t reply. Before long, his shoulders began to tremble.

“S-Sensei?”

I slowly approached, and a terrifying expression that could only be described as that of a crazed serial killer made its way onto his face. The expression he had now made his usual displeased face look like one of a benevolent saint. It was rare to ever see him this angry.

“I can’t... bear this any longer!”

The author said stiffly, as if squeezing the words out, slammed the thick manuscript on the desk, and briskly left the study.

Looking closer, the manuscript was brutally torn into pieces.

What could be the meaning of this—?

It was a completely unexpected turn of events.

*

After being abandoned in the middle of the conversation and knowing not what to do, I stood alone in the office for a while. But after waiting for a long time, the author failed to return, and so I went out to look for him.

“Sensei, where are you? He’s not here, either.... Oh! Don’t tell me he went to go take a bath?!”

“Is your brain made of ohagi? Why would I have a need to suddenly go and take a bath?”

“Wah!”

The author said and suddenly appeared from the kitchen. On the table was an assortment of seasonings and peeled vegetables. Although few, the plates, cooking utensils, and ingredients were all organized to be easily accessible. For me, the usual user of the kitchen, that was.

“It’s because you just suddenly disappeared in the middle of an important conversation... What on earth happened? Ah, Sensei, you have an apron on. Wow! It doesn’t suit you at all!”

The author was wearing a simple apron over his usual clothes, and holding a mortar in his hand.

“Sensei, it’s rare to see you in the kitchen. You usually never cook anything. Even when you’re on the brink of starvation.”

The truth was, most of the seasonings in the kitchen were ones that I had brought. Kudou-sensei has never cooked on his own, at all.

Just like how a penguin would never do knitting. That’s how unlikely he is to cook. Moreover, if left alone, he’ll start eating the seasonings straight from their bottles, so I have to make sure to keep an eye on him whenever he’s in the kitchen. But despite all that, here he was now, in the kitchen, and wearing an apron.

“What’s that....?”

I peeked inside the bowl that the author was holding. Inside was a mysterious mixture of green and purple power,

blended together to make a troubling color.

“Oh, Sensei... if you couldn’t wait any longer, you should have just said something.”

Nervously, I reached into my uniform pocket and took out a small bundle.

Since I’d come to visit the author today, I’d actually been waiting for the right time to give it to him.

That day, Hanamoto Hibari was nervous.

Anxious about being able to make them well.

If I were a novelist, that was probably how I would write out my feelings at the moment.

The next class after modern Japanese was home economics.

After Touka-chan had thrown me with a Tomoe Nage, we hurried to change classrooms and made cookies. I could feel the physical strain on my body from making cookies immediately after being thrown, but it was still fun to bake together with everyone. And as was natural amongst a group of girls, the topic turned to who everyone would be giving their homemade cookies to.

“Hibari-chan, who are you giving them to? Tell us. Come on, just spit it out. Aw, are you getting embarrassed? You’re shaking all over!”

“Oh, just leave me alone!”

I didn’t confess no matter how much my classmate, Mizorogi Yue-chan, interrogated me, but if anyone had watched how I’d made the cookies, they would have figured it out right away.

The reason being that I’d grinded up a bunch of coffee beans to use as a secret ingredient.

Although everyone else tried to stop me, and kept asking me if I was sure about using them.

“With that said, here are my specially-made Hibari cookies. Please, help yourself!”

“What are those?”

“But I just told you that they’re cookies.”

In spite of the fact that I’d offered to him with my best smile, the author was looking at them with a gaze that might be directed at some strange bug that he’d spotted in the corner of the bath.

“And why did you remember them just now?”

“Why, because you’re hungry, aren’t you? You were overcome by a sudden pang of hunger and started cooking something to eat, right? So I thought these Hibari cookies might help with that! Hey, wait a minute! Why’re you closing your eyes and making that anguished face like I’ve just added to your problems?! They’re cookies! Delicious cookies!”

I jumped up and down in front of him, desperately trying to get him to notice the cookies, but with little effect. Instead, he placed the mortar he was holding on top of my head.

“Quit hopping around. I’m not hungry. And besides, I’m not making this to eat myself. It’s bait.”

“Bait?”

"Now, mind you, this isn't bait for you. Stop reaching for it! Such an ill-behaved girl."

"I'm not reaching for it! Don't make it sound like I reacted when I heard the word 'bait'!"

I couldn't stand how he decided what I was doing like I was part of the novels he wrote.

"But come to think of it, this might be just what I need."

"So you do want it, then? Hehehe, I'll let you have a little bite, if you insist."

Half-teasingly, I waved the bundle of cookies before him, and to my surprise, he took them with a serious look in his eyes.

"Hibari-kun, this is perfect! I was thinking that something was missing. You have my thanks!"

"Oh, Sensei, you're exaggerating... But I never thought you'd be so happ—"

"How convenient."

The author said, and poured every last cookie into the bowl.

"Ah."

He did it with no hesitation, as if he'd been planning it from the start.

And then, he crushed up my cute cookies and mixed them together with the eerily-colored powder. Lastly, he added a small amount of water and shaped the solution into a round, dumpling shape. It no longer looked anything like a cookie. It was more like... a pathetic ball of sludge?

Huuuh? That's weird. Despite all I'd learned in home economics at school, and read so many recipe books, I had absolutely no words for what I saw before me now.

"Hmph. It's done!"

"How can you say that?! What're you doing?! You're horrible! I worked so hard to make them! I put so much effort into kneading the dough!"

"Here, and here, and somewhere around here..."

"Are you ignoring me?!"

The author was walking around and placing those small dumplings on the floor in the corners of the kitchen.

"And lastly, the study."

Paying no attention to my protests, the author took the remaining dumplings and headed back to the study. Taking with me the sadness of a girl whose carefully-made cookies had been reduced to sludge dumplings in the matter of seconds, I chased after him.

Just like he'd done in the kitchen, the author was walking around the study and placing the dumplings in corners of the room.

"Sensei, is this some sort of ritual for good luck?"

"Haven't I already told you? It's bait. For these past several days, I've been tormented by rats. I've just about had enough with the vermin."

“Rats?”

“It’s obvious if you take just one look at what they’ve done to my manuscript!”

The author pointed at the torn-up manuscript on his desk. Looking at it carefully once more, it finally made sense to me.

“Ah, so the rats were the ones that chewed it up!”

“I noticed earlier that the drawer was open just a crack. They must have gotten in through there.”

It certainly didn’t look like a person had torn it up. It seemed more like some small animal had eaten through the paper.

“And so, that’s why you used my cookies to make a bait to lure out the rats?”

“It’s not just bait. They’re specially-made with anesthetics! I would have overlooked it if they’d merely chewed on the table leg, but now that they’ve meddled with my manuscript, there will be no mercy. I’ll kill them and all their descendants for the next seven generations! I’ll make them regret being born as rats! Fwahahaha!”

I understood the situation now. Knowing the author’s personality, it didn’t matter if it was rats or the power of the state. Since they’d ruined his precious manuscript, he wasn’t going to hold back in exacting revenge. Of course, from an outsider’s point of view, it seemed very childish.

He hardly seemed like the person who, just a while ago, had been gallantly talking about how stories were salvation for the readers’ soul.

“I won’t kill them right away. After they’ve been drugged, I’ll slowly skin them one at a time on the cutting board over twelve hours, with their lovers watching over the whole time. And finally, I will say this. ‘Meow before the one you love. Throw away your dignity as a rat and meow just like a cat.’”

“Cut it out already!”

“Ugh! Why you... headbutting me in the stomach....”

Although I’d used my body to physically stop the author from taking it any further, the fact still stood that the rats had chewed through his manuscript. Would I secretly let them free once the bait had trapped them? No, that wouldn’t solve anything....

“My, it seems noisier than usual in here today.”

As I was losing myself in my thoughts, Kareshima-san appeared, holding a cloth-wrapped bundle in his hands.

“I heard your voices all the way from downstairs, so I let myself in.”

“Kareshima-san, you won’t believe this. Sensei is being so terrible I can’t even bear to look at him!”

“That’s the last straw, you little runt!”

“Now, now. On a more important note, Senpai, you have another guest waiting for you.”

Standing behind Kareshima-san was a tall, slender man, looking quite apologetic. He was wearing a full-piece business suit, but the cloth seemed a bit worn out.

“Oh, it’s you.”

The author had been crouched over and clutching his stomach in pain, but as soon as he saw who it was, he stood up straight and took on a bossy attitude.

“That’s not a proper greeting, Sensei. I’ve come to collect the manuscript you promised.”

“Yazume-san, good afternoon!”

I’m also quite familiar with this person. He’s Kudou-sensei’s editor, Yazume Masachi. Twenty-five years old. After several years of rejection, he had finally been accepted into a university, and though graduated last year, he had been unable to find an occupation. Amidst his stumbling around unemployment, he eventually found his current position as the editor-in-chief of a publishing company. On his very first day of work, he had said with a smile,

“I know nothing about the publishing business, but I’ll do my best!”

As if those words had brought about his demise, he had been appointed as the editor for the infamous, bizarre author, Kudou Renma, upon entering the company, and from there, his days of suffering began. The author always makes him worry about the manuscripts so much he seems likely to develop stomach ulcers. He’s forced to run around and gather writing references, and stepped on just for the sake of killing time—— But even then, he doesn’t run away, and always comes back to the author’s side. Perhaps that was why——

“It doesn’t feel like what you go through is all that different from my experiences...”

“Hibari-san, you’re the only one that truly understands my suffering!”

In spite of his height and handsome face, Yazume-san is a very kind person, and can’t drink coffee unless it has plenty of sugar in it. That said, I’m equally as much of a sweet tooth as he is.

Being both sweet toothed, we were also part of what I liked to call “The Victims of Kudou Renma Society,” and whenever we saw each other at his house, we would exchange stories about what kinds of disservice the author had done us.

“This victims’ society of yours, shall I disband it with ruthless malice?”

And whenever Yazume-san and I spoke like this, the author’s mood would always take a turn for the worse. It was awfully selfish of him, seeing as how the cause of all this was his own daily, arrogant behavior.

“So, Sensei... about that manuscript...”

Yazume-san asked tentatively, as if facing a hostile beast. The author responded by handing him the manuscript that had been chewed up by the rats.

“...What is this? A document that was excavated from some ancient ruins?”

Unable to grasp the situation, he looked back and forth between the author and the manuscript.

“It’s the manuscript you wanted. Take it and leave.”

It would seem that the manuscript that the rats had eaten away had been the one Yazume-san had come to collect that day. It was no wonder the author had been so furious.

“Um, but it’s so torn up that I can’t even read it properly.... Is this your new take on a crime thriller?”

“The answer is inside the rats’ stomachs. They’re somewhere in this house, so if you want to read the whole thing, find them and have them cough it up.”

“Meaning... that....”

“The rats ate it.”

“Is there any way you could rewrite it....?”

“I don’t care enough to.”

“Nnn.....”

“Ahh, and now Yazume-san’s crying.”

I couldn’t think of anything to say to him. It made my stomach hurt to watch.

“Now, now, Yazume-san, why don’t you sit down first?” As I tried to think of what to do, Kareshima-san stepped up and kindly guided him to a chair.

“There’s nothing to worry about. If he really had no intention of writing it again, he would have already kicked you out. But since he’s explained to you what happened, it means that he plans on rewriting it.”

He comforted Yazume-san as if holding down the lid on a boiling pot. I decided to take this chance to also try and help.

“I’ll go make some coffee! With lots and lots of sugar!”

Yazume-san, who was being generously comforted from either side, wiped his tears while choking out words of thanks. The author merely looked on with disgusted eyes as if watching the hatching of woodlice.

“Come now, Sensei! Don’t say any more mean things and just hurry and write him the manuscript! Even if it’s a little unreasonable, as a professional writer, it’s times like these that you have to try your best!”

“Try my best? Even if it’s a little unreasonable?”

I had said those words to motivate him, but the author reacted to them in an entirely different way.

“I refuse. In the first place, doing what’s unreasonable and trying one’s best are two different things. Don’t go thinking you can budge a writer with such careless wording!”

“What are you going off about this time? Honestly, now isn’t the time....”

“Imagine that there is a very heavy rock is in front on you.”

Great, and now he’s started to give some weird example. Obviously trying to avoid the topic by going off on a tangent. It was my fault for saying something unnecessary again.

“You must move that rock to another location. What will you do?”

“Umm.... I’ll try my best, with all my might, and pick up the rock.”

In my head, I imagined a heavy rock, and then answered the question. And when I did, the author looked at me with a nasty face and hit me on the head.

“Nothing will come out of trying your best there. You’re just trying to do the impossible.”

“Then, what does it mean to try your best?”

“Discipline your body daily and raise your stamina and strength. In time, you’ll be able to lift the boulder. That’s what it means to really try your best to accomplish a goal. That’s what effort is.”

His reasoning actually made sense.

“Somehow, this doesn’t really sound like the things you usually say.”

“Of course, there are other ways to go about it. You could find some tools and move it using the principle of leverage. Or you could save up enough money to hire someone to remove it for you. These are all forms of effort. The point is to use your head and think of different ways to approach it.”

“So in the end, the solution is money, is it...”

“As long as the rock ends up being moved, that’s all that matters.”

Suddenly, I realized something. I thought to myself, perhaps he isn’t trying to avoid the topic, but instead, he was using this example as a metaphor for something else.

Use your head to think of how to move the unmovable rock. In the situation, the “rock” was——

“Sensei, please stop trying to avoid the topic because you don’t want to write the manuscript again.”

“Avoid the topic? And what do you mean by that? Although, I actually don’t want to write the manuscript a second time. Sorry to tell you.”

This was my last chance to make a proposal.

“Oh, I see how it is! So you flat-out refuse to write it, is that it? Then how about playing a game with me?”

“A game?”

He took the bait!

“That’s right. If I win this game, you’ll promise to rewrite the manuscript and give it to Yazume-san.”

“Hibari-san! You’re a goddess! A goddess detective!”

I could hear Yazume-san’s cries of joy from behind me. It made me feel embarrassed to be praised like that, but at the rate things were going, I was starting to feel sorry for him, and considering my position, I felt that I had to do something.

“How about it, Sensei? There’s no way the great author, Kudou Renma-sensei, would run away because he was afraid of losing to a little girl.... riiight?”

Ahhh, I’d said those words to provoke him into playing the game, but now that I’d said them, I was scared, so so scared, of what would happen next!

“Little girl.... I show you an ounce of kindness and you go and get ahead of yourself.... Shall I remind you who’s mercy allows you to be walking on two legs right now?”

Ahh, he’s really angry. Now that it’s come to this, I have no choice but to follow through.

“You said that if I lose, I have to write the manuscript. In that case, if you lose, you’ll also be forced to accept some form of punishment.”

Writing the manuscript was his job, rather than a form of punishment, but I decided against arguing it at the moment.

The author had a hand on his chin, finding true enjoyment in thinking up what punishment to give me. I waited for the whip to come cracking down, watching him with the mentality of a slave.

I had no idea what ruthless request might come from the author, who was like the human personification of sadistic.

Glancing behind me, Yazume-san was just as nervous as I was waiting for the author to speak. He had the face of a puppy that had been grabbed by the stomach. Kareshima-san had walked off to take a book off one of the shelves and started reading. He had a face that seemed to say, "Let me know when this mess has been all cleared up."

At long last, the author nodded slightly in satisfaction and said,

"Then, if you lose, you'll quit pretending to be a detective."

——Come again?

The words that had come out of the author's mouth had been completely beyond what I had imagined.

Quit pretending to be a detective?

That was the punishment that he wished on me?

I was curious about what could be his aim in that, but before that——

"Um, but I've never really had any intention to pretend like I'm a detective."

Before anything else, I had to clear up any misunderstandings about this.

"Are you really trying to deny it now? You, who reads mystery novels from my bookshelves day and night, who pines after Akechi Kogorou, who plunges headfirst into any case that occurs around you despite what I might say against it and gets into all kinds of trouble?! You're already a fine detective. An amateur detective."

"Uu...."

What he said was certainly true.

"B-but I've never once called myself a detective!"

"Yes, that may be. Rather than being a detective by occupation, you've volunteered to act as a detective in your everyday life. That's what being an amateur detective is. A role that forms from acting on your surroundings. Looking at it this way, you've already started on the path of being an amateur detective."

The author laughed at me silently, as if to say, "Your skill as amateur detective isn't any different from the average person, and in certain cases, it might even be worse."

"I understand what you're trying to say, but.... Why would you have to tell me to stop assuming that role?"

"Hmph, ask what's in your own chest for the answer to that."

My chest.....? Chest....

"Don't say anything about my chest!"

The sad thoughts had come back again.

"Umm, going back to the game, what will you two be doing.....?"

Yazume-san, who had been watching our exchange in silence, shyly raised his hand. Come to think of it, we'd never decided on what the game would be.

Right away, the author said this,

"Book searching."

"....Book searching?"

I automatically looked up at the bookshelves lined up behind where the author was standing. In them were rows and rows of books from every time period and country.... well, a certain selection of them, anyway.

"I'm going to give you three clues. And using those, you are to find, somewhere in this house, the book that I wish to read right now, and bring it to me."

The author pretentiously ran his finger along the spine of one of the books on the shelves. "It'll be easy for a detective like you, right?" It was obvious in his face that that was what he wanted to say.

"In other words, you're testing Hibari-chan's skills of deduction and insight as a detective, correct?"

Kareshima-san suggested without lifting his eyes from the book he was holding.

"I-I understand. I'll find that book! So then, what are my three clues?"

"Very well then. The first clue is this. The book that I wish to read right now is 'a book that *you* have read before as well.'"

"As you'd expect from Kudou-sensei. You've committed everything about Hibari-chan to memory, haven't you?"

Kareshima-san interrupted.

"She's always telling me whenever she's read a new book. Each and every time. Like it or not, I can't help but remember it."

He didn't have to make it sound like such a nuisance.

"But doesn't this already narrow it down quite a bit?"

Yazume-san seemed quite pleased. He must have assumed that the condition "a book that I have also read before" was a considerable advantage.

But——

"Yazume-san, unfortunately, it's too soon to celebrate."

Kareshima-san explained my thoughts for me.

"The number of books that Hibari-chan has read in this house is *a little more* than you might think."

"I-Is that right? Now that I think about it, on top of your love of books, you've been coming here for quite a long time, if I recall. In that case... it could be any book out of several hundred books, then?"

"Try several thousands. No, perhaps even ten thousands."

As I waited patiently for the author's next words, I could feel Yazume-san staring at me, rendered speechless by what Kareshima-san had said. He was right; it was much too early to try and narrow down which book it could be.

“Although she reads a lot, Hibari-kun always chooses works of fiction, and rarely reads books on thesis or the technical aspects, so you could say she’s rather lacking in knowledge.”

“Y-you don’t need to mention that!”

I wish he’d at least leave my preferences alone.

“What’s the second clue?”

Watching with glee as I desperately sorted through my mental library, the author slowly opened his mouth.

“The second clue is—— ‘The eleven blank days.’”

This time, his words were shrouded in mystery. I tried to remember if I’d ever seen a book with that title, but nothing came to mind. In the first place, this eccentric author wouldn’t just outright hand me the title of the correct book. Instead, this must be an important clue in identifying the book.

“The eleven.... blank days..... Wait, I’ve heard that somewhere before.....”

“Really put that brain of yours to use and think hard about it. Now then, the next clue is the last one.”

As he said this, the author looked as if he’d committed the heinous crime of planting a bomb somewhere in this house.

“The book that I wish to read——‘Describes you in your current situation.’”

Saying this, the author pointed straight at me. No matter how you looked at it, it was clear that he was pointing at me and no one else.

“....It describes me? Um, what do you mean——”

“That’s all three clues! I have nothing else more to say. Gather up your wit and seek out that book, amateur detective!”

As if to drive me away, the author said this and clapped his hands a few times. Like he was telling me to figure out the rest on my own. At this point, no matter how much I screamed and cried, he wasn’t going to tell me anything else. Even if I threatened to hang myself in front of him unless he told me, it would be of no use.

“Good luck, Hibari-chan. If you lose this game and with it, your job as a detective, feel free to come to Kokuudou.”

“I’m counting on you, Hibari-san! For the sake of the manuscript! The manuscript!”

After receiving words of encouragement from Kareshima-san and Yazume-san—though I wasn’t very sure about calling them ‘encouragement’—I dashed out of the study.

*

Although I’d dashed out of the study so confidently, I froze as soon as I was out in the hallway. To be perfectly honestly, I still had no leads at all. I hadn’t the faintest clue of which book it could be.

A book that I have also read before.

The eleven blank days.

A book describing me in my current situation.

With these three clues, I was to find the book that the author wished to read. If this were an ordinary house, that wouldn't have been such an impossible task. If it were your average house, I would only have to look through a few dozen books, or at most, a single bookshelf. But this house is far from normal. In this house is an unbelievable number of books. There are close to ten thousand, even two thousand books here. Among all these books, was it even be possible for me to find the one, correct book?

"No, this won't do. I have to think this through before it gets dark."

I couldn't stop trying to think. In order to make it easier to see the truth, I first organized the information that I knew.

First, in total, there were four rooms with books in them in this house. The study I'd just come out of, the parlor next to the kitchen, and two rooms on the second floor that are being used as libraries.

Of those, the rooms that held the most books are the libraries on the second floor, and the study.

As for the parlor, the two bookshelves there are comparatively small, such that I could reach the top shelf if I stand on my toes, making it the room with the least books.

Should I start searching from the libraries on the second floor, which holds the most books?

No, I decided to think it over a bit more.

I tried to remember what kinds of books were in those libraries, and what purpose the author used them for.

If I remembered correctly, most of the books in the libraries are ones that he doesn't read on a daily basis. In contrast, he keeps the books that he frequently reads in his study, where he can easily access them.

In that case, what kind of books are books that he doesn't read on a daily basis? The answer is an obvious one; reference books that he's collected for the sake of writing novels in the past. The reason for this is that the author hates to use a motif in future novels if he's already used it once. Which meant that books that he'd already read once for the sake of writing previous novels would naturally be stored in the libraries.

As the author had pointed out, I mostly read literature and works of fiction, and rarely ever reference or technical books. If the correct book was "a book that I have also read before," looking in the libraries, which were full of books I had never read, wasn't a priority.

With that in mind, I headed for the parlor. Quietly, I opened the door and peered inside. This room is one I usually don't go into. In between two sofas facing one another was a dignified-looking black, wooden table. Being called something as fancy as a parlor, this room is only used when there were special guests.

Then did that mean that people like Kareshima-san, Yazume-san, and I aren't special, and instead regular guests? But knowing Kudou-sensei, he'd just coolly say that we weren't even deserving to be called guests.

Up against the wall opposite of the door were two bookshelves, nestled close together like siblings. They were the same as when I'd last seen them. I immediately ran up to them and began skimming the spines of the books. As I did so, I thought about the second clue.

What did he mean by "the eleven blank days"? I still had the feeling that I'd heard this phrase somewhere before. No, maybe not heard, but seen something with similar wording in a some book. In any case, I was certain that it was hidden somewhere in my memories.

"Blank.... Blank space, blank paper, empty..... Eleven days.... One more day than ten. Ten plus one.... Plus and minus?"

Thinking that it was some cruel wordplay or code, I tried saying aloud every possibility I could think of, but none of

the words gave me any insight.

Was it some kind of condition that had appeared in a novel.....? Which meant that it had to be a mystery novel?

I once again thought over the characteristics of the issuer of this riddle, Kudou Renma. First of all, Kudou-sensei had said, "Find the book I wish to read," but that was probably a lie. He wouldn't choose the correct book based on such a simple motive. As the issuer of the riddle, there was sure to be some kind of hidden message. A message for me, the riddle solver. It was most likely to be strongly linked to the third clue, "a book that describes me in my current situation."

Me in my current situation. It was clear that "current situation" meant "the situation I've been in today."

With that in mind, I carefully went over every conversation I'd had with the author since coming here today. I was sure to come across some kind of sign. Gather up your wit and seek out that book. That was what the author had said to me.

At that moment, I heard his voice calling all the way from the study.

"I forgot to tell you. You have until five o'clock. You don't have the leisure to be rambling to yourself or describing an elaborate scene like in serious literature."

"Ehhh?! Why is there a time limit?!"

"You fool! You have thirty more minutes, understand? You piece of junk!"

He reminded me, purposely sandwiching the words between two insults. Rather than a mystery writer, this person was nothing more than a foul-mouthed villain. But that wasn't important right now. I no longer had the time to be leisurely thinking this through.

I picked up thinking where I'd left off, about the message that Kudou-sensei was trying to tell me.

"Me in my current situation. Me, of right now——"

I tried to figure out the intention of the riddle issuer, read into what the author wanted to convey.

I thought back to the first thing I'd talked about with him when I'd come here; the incident during my modern Japanese class. Was it connected somehow to what I'd said about mystery novels being excluded from textbooks? Was there some kind of foreshadowing?

"Me, of right now—— Me——of today."

Realizing that time was running out, I repeated those words to myself over and over, trying to think it over as quickly as possible.

——The situation I've been in today.....

How long did I stand there in front of the bookshelves, lost in thought? Eventually, the grandfather clock in the hallway rang out, announcing the fifth hour.

At that moment, I came to realize the truth, in such a way that felt as if the place that I standing in was turning upside-down.

*

"My, my, if it isn't the return of the great detective."

As I entered the study, the author greeted me with an arrogant smile on his face. Kareshima-san was casually seated in a chair, completely unchanged from when I'd left. Yazume-san was also seated, but was slumped weakly against the table like a daikon that had been left out to dry in the sun for seven days and seven nights. Depending on the results of the game, he could end up having to leave without the manuscript, so I could see why his spirits were weary.

"So then, Hibari-kun, were you able to find which book it might be?"

The author was sitting in his favorite chair, crossing his legs in an exaggerated fashion. After I'd settled down a bit, I nodded yes.

"Oh? But you don't seem to be holding anything."

As he said, I didn't have any book with me. I was completely empty-handed. But that was fine. The moment I'd come to the answer, I had also realized where the book was located.

"The book that you wish for is in one of the bookshelves in this study."

I confidently walked up to a bookshelf and standing up tall, I stretched out my arm. Leaning forward, Yazume-san observed which book I was reaching to pull out.

Before long, I took out a certain book and held it out to the author.

"Agatha Christie's 'The Murder of Roger Ackroyd'. This is the book you want, correct?"

A short silence, one that could be measured with one hand, swept over the room. Still seated in his chair, the author looked down at the cover of that book, but immediately looked up at the ceiling in a bored manner and said,

"Masachi, wait until ten o'clock."

"Huh....? You mean....."

Hearing his name called suddenly, Yazume-san jumped up from his chair.

"I mean that I'll write the manuscript for you."

It would seem that I had won the game.

As if it had been dyed by some kind person somewhere, floating in the night sky was a beautiful full moon.

"Thank you! Thank you so much!"

In front of the small gate outside of the house, Yazume-san bowed his head over and over.

"Thanks to you, it seems that I'll be able to leave here with the manuscript as planned!"

"O-Oh, no.... It was nothing."

Along the street that had turned pitch dark, street lights slowly flickered on. I could see tiny moths that had already been drawn in by the light, and were fluttering in a trance around it.

"But how were you able to figure out the correct book? I couldn't get it at all."

That had been the biggest problem. It was only natural that Yazume-san didn't know the answer. The reason being that it had been a riddle that no one else but I would have understood.

"I'm amazed that you were able to find it with only those three clues. That book, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, is one of Agatha Christie's most well-known works, isn't it? If I remember, it was written more than ten years ago..... I wonder why Sensei would suddenly want to read that book."

As Yazume-san had said, "*The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*" is the third in the series of novels which features the great detective, Hercule Poirot, and among all of Agatha Christie's novel—or rather, among all mystery novels ever written, it stood out as a remarkable work read by many.

The story begins with the strange death of a woman in a village called King's Abbot. Afterwards, a well-known man in the village, Roger Ackroyd, is found murdered in his study, and though there are several suspects for being the culprit, the conclusive evidence is lacking. Under these circumstances, a certain character in the story serves as Poirot's assistant, taking notes on the case, while also investigating and deducing on his own.

As mentioned above, this is the premise of the novel.

"It was the second clue, 'the eleven blank days,' that helped me to see the light. Those words were meant for pointing me in the direction of Agatha Christie."

"Is there any relation between 'eleven days' and Agatha Christie?"

"I believe it was in December of the year 1926. Agatha Christie, who, at the time, was already a well-known author, suddenly disappeared one day after leaving her house."

"Ah! Now that you mention it, I do remember hearing about that, as well! About how her whereabouts were unknown."

"Afterwards, she was found living in a hotel under a different name, and the number of days until she was found——was eleven days."

"So that's why it's 'the eleven blank days'....."

Even today, the details of her disappearance are still unclear. Even Agatha Christie herself has never revealed the truth.

"I've read in her biographies about how this mysterious incident revolving around the up-and-coming mystery writer caused an uproar at the time. It was pure coincidence that I remembered this when I did."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that! It's amazing that you were able to find the answer from there."

"Actually, the words, 'the eleven blank days' didn't only point me to the author. There was one other clue hidden there."

While distracted by the frayed ends of my braids, I continued.

"Yazume-san, do you remember when *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* was published?"

"Umm... before the war.... No, during the Taisho era?"

Yazume-san earnestly tried to think of the answer, but in the end, he wasn't able to come up with the correct one.

"I'm sorry. I still need to study more.... What year was it again?"

I wasn't sure if the reason he didn't know was because he was still a green editor, or simply because I was an enthusiast for mystery novels.

“It was published in 1926.”

“.....Ah! It's the same year!”

For a moment, he had been frozen like a wind-up toy waiting for its spring to be wound, but upon realizing the connection, he cried out.

Yes, the year in which *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* had been published and the year that Christie had gone missing were both 1926.

“From these two points, I determined that *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* was most likely the correct book. Furthermore, it also qualified under the first condition of being ‘a book that I have also read before.’”

“I see! Making full use of the clues, you were able to arrive at the truth! Oh, how splendid! To win against that Kudou-sensei! I think that Sensei will finally realize your strength this time, Hibari-san. After all, you were able to tame that unruly, man-eating wolf of an author and got him to write the manuscript in his study as promised, right as we speak!”

Perhaps due to the fact that he knew that he was getting a manuscript that he had nearly given up on, Yazume-san had become quite talkative.

“Yazume-san, if you say things like that, Sensei will bully you terribly for it later. He has a frightening ability that allows him to sense when bad things are said about him, even when he himself isn't present at the scene.”

“Eh.... Th-there's no way that could be. Ah, no, it might be possible....”

“Sorry to keep you waiting, Hibari-chan. Hm? Yazume-san, what's the matter? You look like you've just seen a ghost.”

Kareshima-san, who had just come out, laughed when he saw Yazume-san's face.

Bidding farewell to Yazume-san, who was staying behind to wait for the completed manuscript, Kareshima-san and I left the Kudou residence.

“I'll walk you to your house. It's dangerous for a girl to be out alone this late.”

With each step Kareshima-san took, his navy blue haori flickered before my eyes. It was as if the color was meant for melting away into the night.

“Today sure was eventful. Still, no matter what he might say, I think Senpai really does know every book you've read, Hibari-chan.”

“I wonder about that. I never know how much of what he says is true....”

In the same light tone, Kareshima-san then said this,

“Looks like he's letting you get away with playing the detective.”

“....What do you mean by that?”

A bird let out a strange cry from somewhere unseen. Kareshima-san suddenly stopped, and facing in my direction, he leaned close to me and said,

“We're here.”

Before I'd realized, we had arrived at my house.

“Th-Thank you so much for walking me.”

After thanking him, Kareshima-san gave a light wave, and just as he was about to leave, he seemed to have second thoughts and turned back around.

“Oh, right. He told me to pass along a message. ‘If you search the stomachs of the rats, you’ll probably find the sweet, coffee-soaked pieces of the manuscript,’ he said.”

“Ah!”

“You two really do make a nice pair. Haha.”

Laughing, Kareshima-san bent down and lightly pulled on my cheeks.

“Leggo ov me~”

“Come on, Hibari-chan, say ‘lemonade.’”

“Lemwonaad.”

“Aww, so cute~”

He teased me like so for a short while.

Eventually, he disappeared into the night like a whimsical breeze, his sandals clattering against the pavement.

I stood by myself in front of my house, lost in a daze.

So the author had noticed, after all. And Kareshima-san might have noticed as well, after hearing his message. No, perhaps he’d already figured it out as soon as he’d realizing the intent of the author’s riddle.

He must have figured out that I was playing not the detective, but the culprit.

*

This is what happened to me today. The entirety of the incidents on × day in the month of ○.

I hadn’t planned on writing in my diary this late into the night, but it’s difficult to stop once I put brush to paper. I also can’t help but feel motivated to try my best, knowing that Sensei had rewritten the manuscript from scratch.

Since I’ve been writing my diary up until this point, naturally, I’ve only written about things from my perspective. I have not written about things that I don’t know, or things that I haven’t experienced.

At the same time, there are truths that I have *consciously* not written about. Since I am writing my own diary, I’m free to decide what to talk about, and what not to talk about.

But—— The entire time that I’ve been writing, something’s been bothering me. Perhaps I should write down the truth after all, I thought. If I don’t, I don’t think that I’ll be able to sleep at ease after this.

Actually, in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, a trick known as the “narrative trick” is a core part of the story.

The “narrative trick” is a trick that applies to all the text in a novel aside from the dialogue spoken by the characters, which is detonated by quotation marks.

For example, when describing a character, rather than using words like “he” or “she,” using their name to refer to

them allows that character's gender to remain vague. Furthermore, even if they're really an elderly eighty-year-old person, their behavior might be purposely described to seem young. In other words, it means to take advantage of the fact that the reader believes the narrative sentences to be truthful, and unlikely to deceive them.

One of these "narrative tricks" is a technique used in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, commonly known as the "unreliable narrator."

The novel is written in the form of a memoir penned by the character acting as the detective's assistant, while in reality, the plot twist is that the very character writing the memoir is the culprit. Knowing this, everything that the reader has read and put faith into up until that point changes to the untrustworthy words of a criminal. Furthermore, since the writer of the memoir is actually the culprit, he only needs to avoid writing unfavorable things in order to keep his true identity a secret. In doing so, the truth is progressively distorted in writing.

Therefore, people may criticize that such a technique is unfair to the reader, and it becomes a biased mystery-solving game between the author and reader, but putting that argument aside for the moment—— Yes, in fact, I am using that exact technique to write my diary at this very moment.

Now then, I will now bring to light the unfavorable parts that I haven't written about.

Actually, when I went to visit the author's house today, he left right away to go to the store.

"I've run out of ink, so I'm going out to buy more. Be good and make some coffee while you wait or something. Understand?"

Having already finished preparing the coffee at the time, after seeing him off as he rushed out of the house, I poured a cup of coffee for myself. And then, as I blew on my coffee to cool it, I did as I was told and sat in the sofa to patiently wait for his return.

But, at that moment, I noticed that the drawer of the author's desk was open just a crack.

Once I'd noticed this, I could no longer resist the temptation. Although it was completely baseless, I could sense its presence. Somehow or other, I was half-certain that it was there.

——The manuscript for the author's new work was inside that desk.

Just as I'd suspected, when I opened the drawer, there was the manuscript. And before I'd noticed, I was engrossed in reading it. Knowing that it was something I shouldn't be doing, my body was honestly.... Wait, what am I writing?

In any case, I couldn't stop turning the pages. This is interesting! This is so interesting, Sensei!

I paused only to take up my coffee cup. And while still fervently reading the words on the page, I brought the cup up to my mouth. Thinking that the coffee would have cooled by then, I took a sip without bothering to check the temperature, and actually, the coffee was still fairly hot. Hot enough to lightly burn my tongue.

I flinched strongly from the shock of how hot it was. And at that moment, coffee spilled from the cup.

Right on top of the author's precious manuscript.

Awawawawawa.... Even thinking back on it now makes my teeth chatter! Oh, how frightening! Oh, heaven forbid!

It was too late for me to regret the terrible thing that I had done. I rushed to the kitchen for a towel to clean up the coffee and dry the manuscript. But no matter how much I tried to dry it, it was useless. The manuscript had been partially blurred and rendered illegible.

What do I do? What am I going to do? Think! You have to think, Hibari!

But there was no more time left to think. I could hear the author's voice coming from the entrance hall. I quickly returned the manuscript to its original place in the drawer, but doing that solved nothing. It was only a matter of it being discovered now and be killed for it now, or it being discovered later and be brutally killed for it later.

Trying not to show my agitation, I then talked to the author about what had happened at school today. I was restless the entire time I was talking, and kept worrying about what was inside the drawer.

When the author suddenly turned his attention to the drawer in the middle of the conversation and reached for the manuscript inside, I felt the sweat drip down my back, and bid farewell to my life.

However, my life still continued after that.

The rats, oh, the rats! They had chewed up the manuscript severely, hiding the fact that I had spilled coffee on it.

Was such a coincidence even possible? In the hour and a half since I'd spilled the coffee and until the author had discovered the manuscript, the rats had chewed up it up, erasing the evidence of the coffee stains.

For a while, I couldn't believe it. But it was the truth.

At that moment, I made up my mind. I would take full advantage of this coincidence.

If I was honest and told the truth, surely the author would only smile and tear me to shreds, just like the paper of the manuscript. Which was why I had no choice but to go through with it. I couldn't expose myself as the culprit!

And as I've explained, the author and I wound up playing a game, but from the conclusion, it becomes evident that he knew from the start that I had read the manuscript without his permission and even spilled coffee on it.

——If you search the stomachs of the rats, you'll probably find the sweet, coffee-soaked pieces of the manuscript.

The message that Kareshima-san had given me explained everything.

He must have guessed the situation from the scent of coffee that still lingered in the study, and from how restless I had seemed.

And hiding the fact that he knew about the soiled manuscript, he had taken joy in watching me step up to the challenge with the confident face of an amateur detective.

And then, he had me bring the novel with similar motifs, "a book that describes me in my current situation," to him with my own two hands.

Planning it in this way, he must have enjoyed slowly wearing down my spirit.

Ohh, it's so frustrating!

....But, I know that I was in the wrong today. While I was trying to decide whether or not to come clean, I was coincidentally saved by the rats, and taking advantage of that, I tried to hide the truth. I'm not only a failure as a detective, but as a human being. Oh, what a shameful life.

Tomorrow, I'm going to go back to the author's house and apologize. I'll probably be strangled and hung from the second floor, but I'll still apologize with all my might. Although, he'll probably seriously tell me to engrave with a fountain pen, "I will never go against you again," on every cell in my body or something along those lines....

In any case, I have to go and apologize.

P.S.

The following day, when I went to the author's house, the rat bait that had been made from my homemade cookies had been cleared away entirely.

"Rats? There couldn't possibly be any here. There might have been last month, but I chased them off with the power of knowledge, courage, and laborers," said the author.

There weren't any rats? Huh? Then, what about the chewed-up manuscript...? Had it been a different manuscript that he'd worked so hard to write late last month.....?

"H-huh....? Huuuh? Then, not only did everyone know from the start, but.... Huuuh?"

In that case, that changed a lot of things.

Had he planned to tease me the moment he'd discovered the coffee-stained manuscript in the desk drawer? If that was the case, for what purpose had my homemade cookies been sacrificed for.....?

That night, it was very possible that he hadn't been rewriting the manuscript at all, but been enjoying making Yazume-san wait impatiently until the very last moment. And when time was almost up, he rewrote only the page that had been smudged with coffee, and gave the manuscript to Yazume-san while pretending to look as if he'd just completed a grueling task.

It was possible. Very possible.

"You were only fooling around with me from the start! You tricked me!"

As I shouted this in the study, the author smiled unabashedly in full satisfaction, as if he had done absolutely nothing wrong.

His next words were so simple that there's nothing to decipher from them, but I'll write them down just for completion's sake.

"Ahaha!"

translation notes;

Tougan-sensei's name: written as 東岸 in kanji, but it also sounds like 冬瓜 (tougan/Winter gourd/melon) which is known for having a bland taste, which is why Touka says "He deserves to live a life as bland as his name." Kudou-sensei also mistakenly (on purpose) calls him Nigauri (冬瓜) meaning "bitter melon". In the same scene, he calls Hibari "sponge head" which in Japanese is, ヘチマ頭 (hechima-atama). "Hechima," when written with the kanji 糸瓜 is another type of melon, the "luffa sponge gourd." The word "hechima" (usually when written in katakana) is also used as slang to refer to something boring or useless.

Tomoe Nage (巴投げ): An overhead throw tactic in judo.

Akechi Kogorou: A fictional private detective created by the Japanese mystery writer, Edogawa Rampo.

Plus and minus: In kanji, "eleven" is written as 十一 which looks like a plus (+) and minus (-) sign.

Haori(羽織): A short coat worn over formal kimono.



It's been a while, but your favorite detective duo is back!

Teniwoha's novel for his Schoolgirl Detective Series, "**The Schoolgirl Detective and Eccentric Author – Night Before The Murder Case at the Mansion of Antiquarian Books,**" acts as a prequel to the first song in the series, "Murder Case at the Mansion of Antiquarian Books," and follows the events between the schoolgirl detective who loves mystery novels, Hanamoto Hibari, and the extremely sadistic mystery novel writer, Kudou Renma.

The third part in this three-part novel is called: *Murder Case at the Ryougoku Haunted Mansion*.

“Hibari and Kudo head to Ryougoku on an errand for Kareshima, who runs an antique book store. Coincidentally, it’s also the Sumida River Fireworks Festival. To Hibari, it almost feels as if they’re on a date, but when they reach their destination, they discover the corpse of a shooting incident....”

This part is further divided into three chapters, so here’s the first one! Masterpost with links to all the translated chapters can be found [here](#).

[←Pt.2](#) | [Pt.3, Ch.2](#)→

* If you can, I highly encourage supporting the creators by buying the book for yourself at [Amazon](#)!

* I’ve changed referring to Kudou as “the author” in the prose sections to the original “Sensei,” since that feels more natural.

—

Chapter One: Don’t Get Possessed Or Anything

Before it was even afternoon, the shopkeeper of the stationary store was watering down the storefront. The water dancing off the pavement looked refreshing, but the stray cats cooling off in the shade jumped up, startled by the splashing.

While wiping down the tables in the shop, I, Hanamoto Hibari, gazed out at this everyday scenery of Kanda-Jinbouchou from the other side of the window. Huge cumulonimbus clouds towered overhead in the skies above.

“It really feels like summer today....”

I heard a vapid voice say from behind the counter.

“This heat just makes you lose willpower in all sorts of ways. Like motivation, energy, patience, courage, luck,”

My father yawned without restraint as he babbled about such useless things.

“What does luck have to do with the heat?”

“Energy.... Energy.... Oh, right, cold air and auras. How about we tell ghost stories to cool off?”

“Quit making a face like you’ve just said something clever. Dad, you should be putting more of that energy towards running the business.”

“You’ve got a pretty sharp tongue now too, Hibari. Is this also thanks to Kudou-kun’s teachings?”

Ignoring my father, I continued briskly wiping the tables and took a water pitcher from the cupboard. Since there weren’t any customers in the shop right now, I thought I’d take the chance to water the potted plants.

This is “Tsuki Fune,” the coffee shop that my father, Hanamoto Yoshifusa, runs. Although it isn’t very big, the shop’s shelves are always full of books—far too many for a coffee shop—that anyone is free to read. In the center, there’s a fireplace that’s always crackling with life during the winter.

The walls are lined with bricks, and the building itself is rather old, but we have quite a few regulars that come by, saying that it makes for a calming atmosphere.

My recommendation would be the coffee, of course. But I think the fruit juices are pretty good, too.

Also, the poster girl of this “Tsuki Fune” would be me, Hanamoto Hibari.

“You’re giving too much water,”

My father opened up his newspaper and said without even looking at me.

“Wah!”

I hurried to lift the water pitcher up.

“At this rate, it’s much too earlier to pass on the title of our poster girl.”

“Ehh?! I wasn’t already the poster girl?!”

It looks like I’d been mistaken. To think that I would learn the shocking truth through a mundane conversation like this one.

“Did you really think so highly of yourself? This is exactly what they call ‘speaking out of place.’ Oh, how frightening. I’ve got chills. But I’ve been properly cooled off now, so thanks.”

What an annoying father.

“And anyway, why would *you* be the one passing on the title of the poster girl?”

“Fwahaha. Do you think you can be more lovable than your old man?”

“Don’t be so gross!”

“Alright, get back to work, poster girl-in-training.”

“Fine, I will. Tomorrow’s my one day off, so I’ll spend it reading books at Sensei’s place! I’ll read while lying on the sofa! I’ll become a disgraceful girl! Oh, how I look forward to it! And of course, Sensei won’t be getting even a single cup of coffee from me!”

“That’ll be a disaster for Kudou-kun, too....”

“Don’t say that like you’re genuinely sympathetic.”

Just then, the bell by the entrance rang. I looked over and saw Kareshima-san, standing there in his usual kimono and bowler hat.

“Hey, Kareshima-kun. Welcome.”

“Kareshima-san, long time no see.”

Kareshima-san took off his hat, and after bowing slightly, he smiled at us.

“Was I interrupting a father-daughter bonding moment, perhaps?”

“No, not at all! Please, come in! Alright, Dad, that’s enough slacking off.”

Kareshima-san sat by his usual window seat and ordered his usual coffee. He’s the young shopkeeper of an antique

bookstore in Kanda-Jinbocho, called “Kokuudou,” and often comes to our shop.

“Thank you. It’s hot today too, isn’t it?”

Was what he said as I gave him his coffee, but I couldn’t see a drop of sweat on him. As usual, he’s a strange person.

“What have you been up to today?”

“I’ve been going out to used book auctions since this morning. These are all my battle spoils,”

Kareshima-san said as he patted the cloth-wrapped bundle that he’d brought with him.

The auctions he spoke of were auction houses held by the Antiquarian Book Association, where many antique books were put up for trade. First-editions, discontinued editions, rare books. People that ran antique bookstores like Kareshima-san often went to these auctions in search of specific books.

“Of course, it’s not always a fruitful search. There are times I have to buy things in a bundle, and I end up going home with much more than I need.”

For instance, say there’s a series with ten full volumes. Even if you only want the first volume, the seller is only willing to sell it as a complete set of all ten volumes. In which case, even if you already owned volumes two through ten, you would have no choice but to buy them altogether. That ends up costing quite a sum of money, so there are times you’ll have to give up on that one book you want so dearly.

“Incidentally, today I was able to successfully bid on several of the books I was searching for without having to take any extras.”

Kareshima-san grinned, and undid his bundle with a practiced hand. Inside, I could see several worn-out books.

“And this one’s the highlight of the batch,”

Kareshima-san said, taking out a moss-colored book bound Japanese-style and showing me the cover. The words, “Study of Ghosts and Souls,” was printed in elegant characters.

“Ghosts? Like the ones that go ‘hyuudoro’ and transform? Is it a book on obake?”

As I had been anticipating what kind of difficult antique book he had found, I couldn’t help feeling a bit disappointed.

“You mustn’t take it lightly just because it says ‘ghosts’ on the cover. When you hear that word, I’m sure you may be picturing the kinds of ghosts that people tell stories of to their children to help cool off their sweat during the summertime. However, ghosts are being studied as a serious academic topic. Not on the grounds of whether or not they exist, but why they still remain, and why people continue to talk about them today. How do they function? How exactly do they influence people’s hearts? Doesn’t it make you curious when you think of them that way?”

Even with his efforts to sell the idea to me, it was hard for me to have anything other than a reproachful view on ghosts right on the spot.

“Also, Hibari-chan, you called them ‘obake’ just now, but that would give the implication of encompassing all youkai. It could be better to refer to them as ‘ghosts’ here.”

“Are obake and ghosts different?”

“Yes. Particularly during the Edo Period, youkai and ghosts were lumped together and often referred to collectively as obake. Back then, people didn’t see ghosts as being individual souls as much as they do now. The most famous

ghost would be the story of Unshuu Sarayashiki (“The Dish Mansion at Unshuu”) from Shimane, or Banchou Sarayashiki (“The Dish Mansion at Banchou”) from Edo, or Banshuu Sarayashiki (“The Dish Mansion at Banshuu”) from Himeji—they’re all well-known stories. You know, the story about the maid servant, or maid, named Okiku who was killed in a well, and returned as a ghost to continue counting plates even after death. Now, in this story, the spirit named Okiku haunts the mansion, or more specifically, the very grounds that the mansion stands on. The mansion’s plates could be seen as the plates of the empty lot, since it has such a strong tie with the land. Doesn’t that seem slightly different than the ghosts you’re thinking of, Hibari-chan?”

Come to think of it, I had a strong impression of ghosts holding grudges against specific people and appearing to spook them.

“Afterwards, the story of the Sarayashiki became a rumor told on the streets, rather than just the experience of a single individual, and the ghost of Okiku became common knowledge among the people of Edo. From then on, it started to be told as a horror story, like saying your friend of a friend apparently saw Okiku’s ghost. Okiku would show herself to even the most ordinary people, and became known as simply a haunted spirit. Rather than a spiritual phenomenon, it became closer to a common horror story.”

“So Okiku-san became too popular as a ghost?”

“Something like that. When an individual spirit becomes widely known, it becomes closer to a youkai. If a spirit from an unknown land becomes recognized and worshipped by enough people, it becomes a god. Still, if you think about it, stories like Okiku, as well as Oiwa from Yotsuya Kaidan (“Ghost Story of Yotsuya”), are only still passed down today because of how well-known they became, so considering the fact that no records of them exist, people must have revered individual spirits more than we thought.”

“It’s not so simple to just call them ‘obake’ then, is it?”

I nodded to show my understanding so far, but Kareshima-san continued to talk excitedly.

“Ah, yes, and about that ‘hyuudoro’ phrase you used earlier. In ghost plays, when the ghost character would appear on stage, the whistling ‘hyuu’ sound of the flute, and the ‘dorodoro’ beat of the drums would be used to accentuate the scene, which is where the phrase originates from. In other words, it’s a sound effect. Thinking of it this way, since olden times, it’s since become a classic as a sound used in horror to stimulate people’s hearing. Isn’t that interesting?”

It looked like my careless statement had ignited a flame within Kareshima-san. I’m sorry for saying ‘obake’ without giving it any thought.

“Incidentally, this book was written in late Meiji by a student of Inoue Enryou, a Buddhist philosopher who was also known as the Youkai Doctor. Because the author passed at a young age, this is the only book he ever published, and there are very few copies in circulation. However, the research content in this book is quite fascinating, so there are many researchers that would want to get their hands on it.”

“Wow.... It sounds like a really important book,”

I said, but since the books I usually read were ones for entertainment, I really didn’t have any idea just how important this book was.

“Why, there’s already someone that’s been wanting me to sell this book to him as soon as I acquired it. He’s been eagerly trying to persuade me to sell it at list price since a while back. I just finished calling him from a public telephone a moment ago, but he sounded insistent about wanting me to deliver the book to him by tomorrow, no matter what.”

“Some people sure are passionate about ghosts.”

“Yes, he’s a very passionate man. After all, it’s practically his profession. He’s Nagao Gensaku, the cultural anthropologist.”

I faintly recalled hearing that name somewhere before.

“I think I have one of the books written by that professor in my study,”

I heard my father say from behind the counter. So that was why it sounded familiar. I remembered seeing that name before on a book from the shelves.

“He says that he desperately wants it for research purposes. Speaking of which, Professor Nagao lives in his mansion in Ryougoku. You know where that is, yes?”

“In the Sumida District, if I recall.”

“Right. Going from here, it’d be upstream of the Sumida River.”

“I see.... Um, but why are you—”

“The professor’s mansion also goes by another name, ‘The Haunted Mansion.’ It’s held in high regards even by dellecantes. As for the reason why it’s been called that, you’ll have to go and see for yourself.”

“No, what I mean to ask is—”

“It’ll be fine. He can be a bit hard to please, but if you bring up a topic that has to do with his research, that’ll put him in a good mood. And also, there’s a lot of places to go sightseeing in the area—”

“Um!”

The conversation was clearly headed in a weird direction now, so I forcibly interrupted before it could continue.

“Why are you telling me all of this....?”

Kareshima-san was smiling innocently.

“Hibari-chan, could I ask you for a favor?”

So dazzling! His smile was so dazzling! But for some reason, I couldn’t go against it.

“Wh....”

“I just can’t step away from the shop tomorrow.”

“What?!”

In any case, that was how my day off disappeared like bubbles. Like a ghost vanishing into the night.

*

The way the old houses nestled close to one another gave me the mental image of the people living in them supporting each other. From the windows, well-used futons were being put out to dry, making it look like the houses were sticking out their tongues.

Posters for businesses like a seaweed wholesale store and a print shop fluttered noisily. They looked about to peel off at any moment. At the same time, children came darting out from the ultra-narrow alleys as energetically as

pachinko balls. It was sure to be some secret passageway that adults couldn't go through. Although I couldn't see very clearly from where I was, they were probably each holding toys like menko cards or beigoma tops.

I got onto the water bus at Eitai Bridge and headed for Ryougoku. The weather was fine, and I was in a good mood, as well. The surface of the Sumida River reflected the noon sunlight, sparkling like a bottle of ramune.

A number of small boats were connected on the riverbank. Behind them, rows of gallery seats had been set up, lined with many Japanese seat cushions. It wasn't something you got to see every day. The fences dressed up in red and white blinded my eyes.

Even though it looked like most of the preparations were already finished, workers from nearby restaurants were still bustling about to set up shop.

"Wow! It's so lively!"

Today was the "Ryougoku River-Opening Festival." Starting from seven in the evening, many fireworks would be launched into the sky. The festival dates back until the year 1733 to the middle of the Edo period. It's said that it was originally a festival dedicated to the water god, and held by the government to drive away diseases that ran rampant during those times. During this festival, fireworks were displayed as a form of entertainment, and that's where it all began.

In any case, it's a seasonal tradition for summer in Tokyo. And naturally, many sightseers from near and far come to see it.

The roads alongside the river were already filled with people.

I had, of course, known that today was the day of the festival, and had secretly hoped to come see it if I had the chance. However, my father had left the house early in the morning to meet an old friend, my classmate, Yue, would be going to see it with her family, and my other classmate, Touka, was busy helping out her father, who was a pyrotechnician. In the end, I wasn't able to make plans with any of my other friends, either.

As a result, I was forced to give up on seeing the fireworks early on.

It wasn't as if I could just go alone, after all.

To tell the truth, I had been really wanting to walk alongside the river....

I looked down at the wrapped bundle tucked under my legs. Inside was the important antique book on obake that Kareshima-san had given to me. Ah, I mean ghosts, not obake.

"It makes absolutely no sense to me,"

Kudou-sensei cursed from beside me as usual. He wasn't even paying any attention to the passing scenery. All he'd been doing was glare at the abundant sunshine with utter contempt while tugging frequently at my pigtails.

This was the "renowned" eccentric mystery writer, the one-and-only Kudou Renma. He seemed extremely displeased with being dragged outside at this hour, as his facial features were more sharp and heinous than they usually were.

Because I've known Kudou-sensei since I was young, I wasn't the least bit afraid of the face he was making now, but the other passengers were noticeably keeping their distance, as if he were a bomb waiting to go off.

I had actually wanted to take advantage of today's errand to go see the fireworks together with Sensei, but....

"Why would we go out of the way to ride a water bus? If we're going to Ryougoku, a taxi would have been fine."

It seemed like this person had completely abandoned enjoying the little things in life. Knowing this, I knew from the start that it would have been pointless to invite him to see the fireworks. Even as we were taking a more scenic route along the Sumida River to go to Ryougoku today, this was how he reacted.

"You just don't get it, do you? It would be a waste to take a taxi on a beautiful day like this. Just take a look at this scenery! And this gentle breeze!"

"You can't see the wind. Also, it's hot. The sun should just drop out of the sky and disappear."

I had spoken dramatically, pretending I was an actress from the silver screen, but Sensei seemed to ignore me altogether.

"I went to pick you up at your house early in the morning while it was still cool, but you wouldn't wake up at all, Sensei. It was already noon by the time we left, so you have no one to blame but yourself."

After Kareshima-san had asked me to run this errand yesterday, I had run straight to Sensei's house.

When the first words out of my mouth had been, "Let's go to the Haunted Mansion together!" Sensei had replied without looking at me, "Is this some new form of religious solicitation?"

"I refuse."

"Aww, come ooon! Let's gooo!"

"Stop it! Quit rocking my chair!"

There had been various bumps along the way, but Sensei had finally agreed while shaking his fist.

"Even with all that whining, in the end, you're always willing to come along."

"The one who was whining was you. And for an entire hour, at that. You threatened me into this. That's called coercion."

In reality, I had wanted to get on the bus from Higashi-Ginza to see the Kachidoki Bridge open, but since Sensei was against making a roundabout trip just for that, I had been shot down.

"Sensei, next time, let's ride the Tsukuda Ferry, too."

"Ride it yourself. And then get lost on opposite shore."

Terrible.

In any case, it felt so nice on the boat. Perhaps it was because of the up-and-down movement of the waves, which was so different from riding the city tram. Or was it because Sensei was there beside me? There were other passengers on board, and they were making quite a bit of noise, but somehow, that was also rather calming to my ears....

"We're here."

"Eh?"

Before I knew it, the water bus had already stopped at the terminal.

"Huh? Did I fall asleep?"

"While using my lap as a pillow, at that."

"Whaaaah?! You're kidding!You *are* kidding, aren't you? How could I have possibly slept in such a daring manner in public...."

"In any case, wipe away that drool, you fool."

As I hurriedly wiped my mouth clean, we got off the water bus.

"Anyway, we arrived at Ryougoku a lot quicker than I had expected!"

Pulling myself back together, I cheerfully stepped out into the street.

"Huh?"

When I took that first step, I realized something. There was something off about how the streets looked. Had Ryougoku always looked like this?

"Huh?! This isn't right! Eh? Where are we?!"

A nearby sign read "Asakusa."

"While you were sound asleep, the water bus passed Ryougoku Station, as well as the Kuramae Bridge, and now we've happily arrived in Asakusa."

"There's nothing happy about this! Uwaaan! We went too far! Why didn't you wake me up?!"

"It was one more way to harass you."

"You're being too honest!"

"Now then, you've made enough noise. Let's go."

"Go where? If we just wait here for the next water bus, we can head back towards Ryougoku right away."

"I'm sick of boats. I'd rather sightsee around Asakusa. We can deliver the package after that."

"What! But the professor is waiting for us. He's really famous!"

I was told that he wouldn't mind when, as long as we visited him within the day, leaving some leeway for the exact time, but I figured that the sooner we carried out this errand, the better.

"I don't care how famous he is. He can wait. You're not coming? In that case, I'm leaving you behind."

"W-wait for me!"

It was no use at this point. It was hopeless to try and convince him. Leaving Azuma Bridge behind me, I chased after Sensei.

The streets downtown were bustling with people. There were people drinking beer in the shade of reed screens. A busy-looking ice seller. A hardware store. There was a store that was selling iced coffee for 500 yen a cup. An old man sweating as he grilled beefsteak on an iron plate.

We could hear Misora Hibari's singing voice from somewhere. Was it from a television? Or perhaps a radio?

Sensei was in an unusually good mood, and humming along with the song that was playing.

Perhaps due to the remnants from the Taishou period, even today, movies, theatre, and comedy shows flourish in

this district. Since I rarely came here, to me, it seemed like everyone was celebrating on the streets because of some special occasion.

“Ah!”

I was spacing out from the heat, or perhaps I was being overwhelmed by the crowds. As I moved to the side to avoid people coming towards us from the opposite direction, I leaned closer to Sensei, who was walking beside me, and accidentally grabbed onto his arm.

“S-sorry.”

“In my opinion, Tokyo’s charm lies not in Ginza, but in Asakusa.”

Just as I was about to pull my hand back, Sensei unexpectedly grabbed my hand firmly and muttered these words.

As I commented about how those words didn’t seem to suit him, he responded with, “They’re Ranpo’s.”

“A long time ago, Edogawa Ranpo wrote those words in his essay, ‘A Taste of Asakusa.’ Things that are amusing, dangerous, vulgar—all thrown together into one big melting pot like a circus. Ranpo felt a certain attraction towards the ominous appeal of this district.”

“Ah, now that you mention it, he mentions Asakusa in his short story, ‘The Man Traveling with the Brocade Portrait,’ too.”

I suddenly started to feel traces of Ranpo’s horror-fantasy novel from my surroundings.

“I forgot you liked Ranpo as well, Hibari-kun.”

“Yes! Some of his stories can be scary, but the ones about the Boys’ Detective Team are the most interesting! It makes me want to make my own Girls’ Detective Team with Yue-chan and Touka-chan!But, anyway, Sensei....”

“For the time being, I’m ‘The Man Traveling with Pigtails.’ Not romantic in the slightest.”

“Um.... Sensei. My.... My hand....”

I tried to get his attention a second time. Sensei had been holding my hand the entire time. Once I noticed that, I became at a loss for what to do.

Was he holding onto my hand so that we wouldn’t get separated?

“Hibari-kun, more importantly, I’m hungry.”

“....I see.”

Maybe it was just my imagination.

We entered a soba shop to escape from the heat. Perhaps it was because it was the middle of the afternoon, but the shop was quite busy.

“By the way, Sensei, what made you suddenly want to go sightseeing around Asakusa? Does your next novel take place in Asakusa?”

I started to suspect that his ulterior motive was to just do his research and go home.

“There’s no specific reason. It’s simply because I’ve been holed up in my house with work lately, so it’s been awhile since I’ve gone out.”

It's merely for exercise, Sensei said as he slurped his cold soba with the usual stiff expression on his face.

"I see. But don't you go out quite a bit—Time to dig in!—for meetings and research? Sluuurp—It's so good!"

"Quite the multitasker, you are."

Having heard our conversation, the family sitting next to us laughed softly. All the while, a steady stream of customers continued to enter the shop.

"But there were several times you weren't home when I stopped by after school."

"Perhaps I was only too focused on my writing to notice a fly like you visiting."

"A fly.... But I'm sure that you weren't home. I checked by pressing up against the window of the study in the back."

"What are you, a lizard?"

Did Sensei not consider doing errands for his work as "going out"? Even though I'd known him for so long, I couldn't help but think that there were still some things I didn't know about him.

Yes, even as I looked at Sensei now, there were times where it felt like I was peering into an abyss.

"How long are you going to be spacing out? The shop's packed now. Hurry up and eat so we can leave, Lizard-kun."

"Don't just go changing my name!"

After that, Sensei and I left Asakusa and crossed Azuma Bridge a second time. Since we were already here, we decided that we'd take the opportunity to go explore a little further.

"There sure are a lot of restaurants around here. It's my first time coming here."

Feeling curious about our new surroundings, I couldn't help but look at everything around us.

"It would be a problem if you were actually familiar with this area, Hibari-kun."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that this a place where you have no business being in."

Still wondering when he meant, I looked around more carefully. And when I did, I noticed an ornately-dressed geisha walking in our direction. I looked at a nearby telephone pole to confirm our location. The sign read "Mukojima."

"Ah....!"

I quickly looked down.

This was a Hanamachi. A place where men would enjoy themselves with women and drinking. I'd become lost in thought while walking with Sensei, and before I'd realized, we had somehow ended up in that kind of district.

"Why has your face gone as red as a ground cherry? Has the heat gotten to you? If so, we should rest somewhere...."

"N-n-n-no need! I'm fine! Completely fine! I'm in perfect health!"

"Well, you certainly seem to be energetic, if nothing else."

Sensei coldly pinched my cheek and stretched it.

“Henhei, are you.... used to places like this?”

Very slowly, I looked up at Sensei. With the sun shining behind him, a shadow was cast over face.

After a short pause, Sensei answered with, “Of course. I’ve visited them several times.”

I was a lost for words, and looked up and down restlessly. In the end, I felt dejected. There had been no reason to even ask. Sensei was an adult. Even when I used to cry at night as a child, he’d already been a fully-grown man. Of course he would have come to a Hanamachi before.

As I bent my neck and back to droop over like an ear of rice in autumn, I felt Sensei’s large hand touch my head.

“You seem to be greatly misunderstanding something. To begin with, the ones I’ve gone to aren’t the type of the immoral places that you must be imagining. You can’t assume that all Hanamachi are the same. There are cases where you simply drink together in a restaurant, or watch them perform on the shamisen or other instrument. In the first place, I only went for research purposes.”

“....Really? You only came to do research?”

I looked up immediately and leaned closer. Sensei pushed my face away in annoyance.

“I don’t particularly fancy alcohol, and if I had the time to be having an affair with a women overnight, I’d much rather be reading books in my study.”

I desperately tried to hide the broad smile on my face.

“So books excite you more than affairs?! Sensei, you’re so weird. An oddball. A pervert.”

“Calling me a pervert is overdoing it!”

“Hyaaaaah! Stop blinding me—!”

As we had that kind of silly conversation, we walked even further. After Sensei started to ignore me, I entertained myself with enjoying this new townscape by looking at potted plants on the roadside or peeking down alleyways. Meanwhile, I started to notice that the people walking on the streets were all headed in the direction of the Sumida River.

“It really looks like everyone is going to see the fireworks today.”

It looked like the geisha had been invited along as well, as I saw them walking together with people.

“How nice.... I want to go see them too,”

I said as I glanced up at Sensei’s face. Ah, just as I thought, it was hopeless. He didn’t look interested. Actually, his face looked like it wanted to say, “What on earth are you talking about? You must be the biggest fool in the Kanto region.” I already knew how hopeless it was, but I still wanted to try convincing Sensei somehow.

“That’s right! If we hurry and finish this errand and stop taking detours, we’ll have plenty of time to go see the fireworks!”

Why hadn’t I realized this sooner?

“Tch. So you’ve caught on,”

Sensei muttered just loud enough for me to hear.

"Ah! So that's why we've been taking detours here and there—because you don't want to see the fireworks!"

"I hate crowds more than I hate trash. Anyway, you don't even need to go to all the trouble of getting close to the fireworks just to be able to see them."

"Sensei, you should be more sensitive towards maiden's hearts and the emotions of Japan!"

"Oi, Hibari-kun."

"The fact that you didn't wake me up on the ship was a part of your plans too, wasn't it?! I can't believe it!"

"Over here."

"Wh-what is it, all of a sudden?"

Sensei had moved under the eaves of a nearby building without me noticing, and was now beckoning me over. Seeing my suspicion, Sensei pointed upwards and said,

"Look at the sky."

"The sky?"

Poking out just my head to look at the sky, I saw gray clouds swirling overhead. Come to think of it, I hadn't noticed how dark our surroundings had gotten until now.

"But if you'd rather be drenched to the bone, then by all means, don't let me stop you."

Almost at the exact same time that he said this, a sudden rain began to fall from the sky.

"Ah, a shower."

The raindrops, carried by the wind, drew a pattern in midair. It was the shape of the wind.

"We don't even have an umbrella...."

"By the look of those clouds, it should stop soon. We'll just wait it out here."

"Here....?"

As I gave the inside of the building another sweeping look, a little elderly lady poked her head out from the back and called out to us with a meaningful smile.

"Welcome. Would you two like a room?"

"....A room?"

"Are you here on a secret getaway?"

"No, we're just—"

"Is it an illicit love affair? An elopement of love? You can't fool the eyes of this old lady!"

"I-it's nothing like that!"

The building that we had entered was a guest house for men and women to spend the night together. Of all the places! Of all the darn places we could have ended up!

I frantically shook my head, and asked her to let us take shelter from the rain for a while. The elderly lady still seemed to think she had assumed correctly about our relationship, and while grinning widely, cheerfully allowed us to stay under the eaves.

“Come to think of it, it hasn’t rained in a while.”

Since there hadn’t been much rain lately, the ground soaked up the rain water thirstily like an exhausted traveler.

The raindrops fell like large marbles that someone has carelessly spilled, blurring our surroundings.

There was a man running while using his coat as an umbrella. A bargain seller hurriedly putting away his wares. Standing together with Sensei, I watched this midsummer scene.

Holding the cloth-wrapped bundle close to my chest, I stole a glance at Sensei. His mouth was closed in a straight line, and he stood facing straight ahead. Was he thinking about his next novel? Perhaps he was thinking of what beautiful words to use to portray the state of this shower.

The wall clock in the back of the shop rang the chime for three PM.

“It’s almost like we’re sharing an umbrella,”

I whispered aloud, in hopes that it would be drowned out by the sound of the chime and the rain. Sensei stood silently beside me.

I couldn’t see any right now, but once the rain let up, I was sure that there would be a rainbow high up in the sky.

*

Thanks to Sensei’s whimsical detours, and having to wait for the rain to pass on top it all off, by the time we’d walked to the vicinity of the mansion in Ryougoku, the sun had already long since set.

When I complained how it would be bothersome to the other party now that we were so late, Sensei had replied with a blunt, “See if I care.”

“I hope there’ll still be fireworks today.”

Would they be able to start at seven as planned? Becoming worried, I looked up at the sky. A cool wind was blowing. Due to the rain, the streets had become cooler, if only for now. Lanterns were lit one after the other in the summer sky.

The first firework went off at about that time. With a sound crackle, it burst open and spread out in the evening sky.

I found myself stopping to watch the sky.

“Waah! Sensei, did you see that?! They’re starting!”

The streaks of deep red light formed an arc, the tips turning into a periwinkle color. Soon after, pale yellow-green fireworks began bursting here and there. I became ecstatic over the sight, and shouted, “Fireworks!” while clinging to Sensei’s sleeve and jumping up and down. It felt like I could just launch into the skies myself.

“Fireworks are made to be launched into the sky. Nothing unusual about that. Now, if by any slim chance, a cat or fish, or something other than fireworks were launched into the sky, tell me. *That*, I would want to see.”

“There you go, saying contradictory things again. Heheh.”

The retreating clouds were now dyed in a pale pink color, and the skies beyond them were painted ultramarine.

Pretty soon, the stars would be coming out.

As we listened to the sound of fireworks exploding in the sky, we walked down winding roads. Around and around we went. On and on we walked. And for a while, we wandered.

We were lost.

“Huh? But it should be somewhere around here....”

We had lost our way. As Sensei glared at me like a snake whose hibernation had been disrupted by something ridiculous, I reached into my pocket and took out the map that Kareshima-san had drawn to check where we were.

“Umm.... Hmmm.”

I moved my body this way and that, staring at the map from every possible angle.

“Are you sure the map isn’t upside down?”

“What? Of course not. It couldn’t possibly—”

It was upside down.

A noticeably lively firework exploded in the sky.

“It’s this way! I’m positive this time!”

Pulling myself back together, I started walking again. Even so, I couldn’t help but be distracted by the fireworks overhead. It was different than what I’d had in mind, but if you thought about it, it was almost as if Sensei and I were watching the fireworks together. When I thought of it like that, it made me a bit happy. Even though Sensei had yet to look up even once.

“Oh!”

I fell forward unintentionally. I’d been too distracted by looking up at the sky that I’d bumped into someone on the street.

Hearing someone laugh loudly at me, I instinctively looked up. Part of the fence was broken, making the residence on the other side visible. The one who had laughed was an elderly man in the garden. He had dark, tanned skin and deep wrinkles on his face. Although he was old, his body looked strong, with shapely back muscles. Overall, he looked like a physically strong person, like a carpenter, or sailor—in any case, someone who did outdoor labor for a living.

“What a tomboyish little lady. Don’t get too excited over the fireworks and fall down now.”

With my face bright red, I looked down. Sensei stood beside me, the colors of the fireworks reflecting off the surface of his well-polished black shoes.

He probably thought I was childish.

“I’ll be more careful. By the way, what happened to this fence?”

To cover up my embarrassment, I tried asking about the fence.

“Ah, apparently someone crashed into it with a bike or something last night. It was like this when I woke up. My son and his wife told me to fix it right away because it looks disgraceful, but it’s not like we got anything to hide, so I’ll just fix whenever I got the time to. In my opinion, the entrance looks a lot worse, but it’s not like we’re blocking it off with

anything, either.”

The old man pointed to the front of the house and said with a laugh. I wondered if all the people around here were like this.

“Anyway, thanks to the fence being broken, I get to talk to a pretty girl like you, so it’s not such a bad thing,”

As he said this, my face turned red again.

“Are you two here to see the fireworks?”

“No, today we’re here on some business to visit the residence of someone named Nagao-san, but.... We’ve gotten a bit lost.”

“Nagao? Why, if that’s where you’re going, it’s the house right behind you.”

“Eh?”

I turned around and came face-to-face with a single story mansion surrounded by elegant hedges.

Thanking the energetic old man, we walked along the hedges.

“Don’t go tripping in any more puddles. Actually, I don’t care if you trip, but just make sure to trip in a way that you don’t splash any dirty water on me.”

“How’s it possible to trip that gracefully?”

I could pick up the faint scent of gunpowder from somewhere. The scent of the fireworks was being carried by the wind.

“Anyway, it looks like this is the backside of the mansion.”

We had made our way halfway around the mansion.

“These are camellias. I’m sure they’ll bear beautiful flowers in the fall and winter.”

I looked over to see Sensei looking up at the hedges with an almost uncharacteristic enthusiasm.

Come to think of it, there were several trees growing in the garden of the mansion where Sensei lived. It was hardly big enough enough to be called a garden, but since it was usually so neglected, it was probably overgrown with vegetation by this time. Was he thinking about how he’d have to do something about it soon?

I imagined Sensei cutting away at the garden trees with a pair of scissors and nearly burst out in laughter at how funny that looked in my head.

Sooner or later, we reached the front entrance. The area was packed with even more people, making me cry out in surprise. Most of them must have been here to see the fireworks.

“Nagao” was clearly written on the mansion’s nameplate. When I’d been told it was called The Haunted Mansion, I had pictured a decrepit mansion with drooping willows in the yard, but so far, nothing about it seemed anything out of the ordinary.

“Excuse me!”

I faced the inside of the house and shouted loud enough to compete with the sound of the fireworks and the din of the crowds, but the residents were nowhere to be seen. Was my voice not loud enough for anyone to hear? With all

this noise, it wouldn't be a surprise.

"I wonder if we'll see lily of the valley come out."

Sensei wouldn't help me at all, and instead muttered something under his breath.

I lost track of how many times I shouted, but by the time my throat was starting to hurt, someone finally came out.

"I'm sorry. You must have been waiting for a long time. How may I help you?"

A pretty woman past her twenties opened the front door. She wore a yukata with lily of the valley flowers against a white background, and her beautiful black hair was tied back in a bun.

She was a tidy-looking girl, unfitting for a house known as The Haunted Mansion.

"I'm.... My name is Hanamoto Hibari, and this is my chaperon, Kudou-san. We've come here today on behalf of 'Kokuudou,' an antique book store in Kanda. We apologize for arriving much later than we had arranged."

Raising the wrapped bundle up to my chest to show her, the girl nodded in recognition.

"So you're guests for my father? Thank you coming all this way. I'm his daughter, Chikage,"

She said, and gave a polite bow. It was a very cordial gesture.

Her shapely eyes left an impression, shining brightly as if constantly pondering something, and the casual motions she made with her fingers were delicate and feminine. Her cheeks and shoulders seemed almost too thin, but she had a fairly full bust.

"That's quite the lovely yukata you have on. Might you be going to see the fireworks with someone?"

Sensei asked with a smile, completely unlike his usual disgruntled demeanor.

"Yes, I was just about to go out. I'm glad we didn't miss each other,"

Chikage-san answered with a reserved smile.

"I assume you're going with a lover, and he lives in this neighborhood?"

"Sensei, it's rude to ask that much."

"N-no, it's alright."

I hurried to stop him, and although Chikage-san was blushing a bit, she willingly replied.

"I promised to go see them together with that person. But, how did you know he lives here?"

"The fireworks have already started, to the point that you can clearly hear them now. And yet here you are still at home. You don't seem to be any rush, either. If your partner were coming here from far away, he would surely be slowed down by the crowds, and it would be harder to arrive on time. If that were the case, you would have left as early as possible to wait for his arrival at the meeting place. However, the reason you haven't done so is because your partner lives in the same neighborhood, and it would be easy to meet him on a minute's notice. That is what I think."

"....Th-that's exactly right."

After listening to Sensei's explanation, Chikage-san seemed genuinely surprised. On the sidelines, I felt a bit of

pride. For Sensei, this level of deduction was a piece of cake.

“Furthermore, is your lover an older man? And not just older by a year or two, but around my age?”

“My! How could you know....!”

I was surprised, as well. How had he been able to figure out something so specific?

“Whenever you refer to your partner, you would call him ‘that person.’ This rules out the possibility of him being someone younger. Also, it isn’t conclusive evidence, but by the way you speak and look at me when we talk, it gives me the impression that you’re accustomed to socializing with men my age. The rest is simply the intuition of an older man,”

That last part sounded as if he was boasting about his numerous past experiences with women, making me puff out my cheeks in annoyance. Chikage-san noticed me doing so, and laughed softly behind her hand.

Ah, I’d been caught—

My face turned even redder than Chikage-san.

“Ah, sorry to keep you waiting outside for so long. I’ll go and call my father straight away,”

Chikage-san said, and went back inside the house. We waited outside of the entrance for the master of the house to come.

After a moment, Sensei suddenly said with a chuckle,

“So I’m ‘the chaperon, Kudou-san,’ am I?”

“I wasn’t sure how to introduce you at the time.”

Even for me, it had felt strange when saying it aloud. I couldn’t deny that my tongue has tingled a bit, too.

“Anyway, it’s so dark inside this mansion even for nighttime....”

Just then, a scream echoed throughout the mansion. Startled, I found myself looking up at Sensei.

We could hear a heartbreaking voice crying, “Father, Father,” from deep within the house. It was clearly not a normal voice.

“Chikage-san! What’s wrong?! Did something happen?!”

I tried calling over and over, but none of the replies I received made much sense.

“What do we do....”

“Let’s go.”

Seeing me just standing there in confusion, Sensei took no hesitation in setting foot into the mansion.

“Wait!”

I quickly took off my shoes and followed after him. Sensei strained his ears to find where Chikage-san’s voice was coming from. After passing through the entrance and going deeper into the house, we reached a dead end, with the corridor in front of us branching out to the left. The hallway was rather disorderly, full of carelessly stacked books, western clothes on hangers, cardboard boxes with unknown contents, and various other things.

The glass door on the right of the dead end seemed to lead to a kitchen, but it wasn't where we had heard the voice come from. We turned left at the corridor, and continued further.

It was even darker here, and the floorboards creaked with every step.

There were sliding panels aligned on each side of the corridor, with a large willow drawn across four of the panels. Although I knew it wasn't possible, as I stared at the picture, it gave the illusion that the leaves were rustling in the wind.

As I listened to the muffled sound of the fireworks, and the lonely cries of the cicada from outside, I stuck close to Sensei's back and moved forward with caution.

We could hear the sound of a woman sobbing her heart out from the end of this bizarre, and somewhat lonesome corridor. It was Chikage-san's voice.

We opened a nearby sliding door and went inside the room. As we thought, it was dark inside. There was no one there.

We pulled open another sliding door, and went to the next room. And then the next room—

Was it really Chikage-san's voice?

We had only spoken to her at the entrance for a few minutes. Could we really be sure that it was her crying?

My resolve wavered. I was starting to lose confidence.

"Sensei.... Is it really okay for us to keep going further like this? After all, I heard that this was a haunted mansion, so I'm a little...."

Who was crying—?

The moment I thought that, I caught my leg in a seam between the tatami mats and fell on my knees. At the same time, I felt my center axis tilt over diagonally.

"Be careful where you walk, Hibari-kun,"

From the other side of his back, Sensei's low voice rang into my ears.

"Right now, your heart is using your extreme anxiety to try and fabricate a ghost inside of you. It's trying to create a ghost that can provide a convenient explanation to this incomprehensible situation. But that is nothing but make-believe. Shake it off. Don't get possessed or anything the moment we've entered the mansion."

"....R-right—!"

Consciously giving a firm reply, I stood back up. I was somehow able to recover after hearing Sensei's words. But I still couldn't keep myself from clinging to his back.

At last, Sensei stopped in front of a certain room.

"It's this one."

He opened the door vigorously.

A gust of lukewarm air leaked out and brushed against my cheeks.

The left side faced the garden, letting in the light of dusk in from the glass door. The light shone on Chikage-san, who

stood in the center of the room. The sliding door on the right-hand side was open just wide enough for one person, perhaps from when she had entered the room.

At her feet was a heavily bleeding man, lying on his stomach on top of the tatami mats.

“This is.... What happened—?!”

As I called out to Chikage-san, who stood limply, I checked on the state of the man. He wore a pale blue-green yukata. He was a bit plump, and looked to somewhere between fifty to sixty years old. He was holding a rifle in his hand.

After gently letting me down, Sensei rolled up the sleeve of his shirt and carefully took the man’s pulse.

“It was no use.... Father is.... already dead....!”

Chikage-san cried deliriously as she leaned against a pillar.

“Then, that would mean that this man is Professor Nagao Gensaku....”

Sensei shook his head slightly, and looked back at me with a sharp look.

“He’s dead.”

Another firework went off, the light illuminating the dim room, as well as the face of the deceased Nagao Gensaku. At that moment, I suddenly felt a gaze.

An empty, terrifying gaze, devoid of any warmth.

It felt like there had been something here just now.

No. It was still here. Right next to us.

Staring intently at us—

So many eyes. Such cold and chilling eyes.

A woman in white clothing.

“Sensei! A ghost!”

I couldn’t help screaming and clinging to Sensei’s back again.

“Calm down. It’s just a picture. A ghost picture.”

“A.... A ghost picture?”

I had squeezed my eyes shut, but I opened one of them to check, and sure enough, it was just a ghost picture hanging on one of the walls.

Its pale face looked blankly in our direction.

“Oh.... I thought it was a real.... Kyah!”

Just as I was feeling relieved, I screamed again.

“Why, what do we have here?”

Sensei said quietly at the sight. I think he might have been smiling.

It wasn't just a single ghost picture that adorned the room.

There were countless pictures, plastered on every side of the room.

Even on the alcove, above the shelf and behind it, on the transom, the pillars, the ceiling—ghosts. There were ghosts no matter which direction you faced in the room.

Ghosts.

Ghosts ghosts.

Ghosts ghosts ghosts.

Ghost ghosts ghosts ghosts ghosts.

Ghost ghosts ghosts ghosts ghosts ghosts ghosts ghosts

Countless ghost pictures.

Pales faces.

Disheveled hair.

Eyes wide open in spite.

A figure stood silently beyond the mosquito net.

To the right, to the left, and even behind us. It was sure to be the same in the next room, and the room next to that one. They were here. There. Everywhere.

The ghosts. It was a ghost mansion.

The whole house was full of ghost pictures.

Translation Notes:

Obake (お化け): (literally means “things that can change, referring to creatures that have the ability to transform or shapeshift”) A category of youkai, usually common spirits and monsters that lack individuality, such that the ghost of Okiku has, for example.

Haunted Mansion (幽霊屋敷): A “haunted mansion” is often to in Japanese as an “obake mansion (お化け屋敷)” however, it should be noted here that in this case, it’s literally referred to as a “ghost mansion (幽霊屋敷)” instead, due to the numerous ghost pictures inside.

Menko (メンコ): A Japanese card game popular with children from the Edo period. More info on them [here](#).

Beigoma (ベーゴマ): A traditional Japanese spinning top popular during the Edo period. More info on them [here](#).

Sarayashiki (皿屋敷): Read full story (or rather, a summary) [here](#).

Ryugoku River-Opening (両国の川開き): The old name for the Sumida River Fireworks Festival (隅田川花火大会), which continues to be held annually every July today. More info [here](#).

Misora Hibari (美空ひばり): A female Japanese singer that was active and popular post-World War II. See more on her [here](#).

Edogawa Ranpo (江戸川乱歩): A Japanese author who played a major role in the development of Japanese mystery fiction. Teniwoha is evidently a fan of his, as Ranpo and his works are referenced several times throughout his novels. In particular, Hibari, the Schoolgirl Detective, as well as the Youkai Youth Detectives in Teniwoha's other series, *Mononoke Mystery*, seem to be based on Ranpo's stories involving the "Boy Detectives Club" (少年探偵団), which Hibari directly brings up liking the most. See more info on him [here](#).

Lizard-kun (ヤモリくん): House lizard/gecko, the kind you'll find stuck to the walls.... Or windows outside of your house sometimes, are called "yamori" in Japanese. It also kind of rhymes with Hibari, which might be another reason Sensei calls her that.

Hanamachi (花街): (literally "flower towns") Districts where people go to drink and be entertained by geisha. Often known as red-light districts, but as Sensei says, you can't assume all Hanamachi to be the same, and you shouldn't confuse geisha for prostitutes.



Teniwoha's novel for his Schoolgirl Detective Series, "**The Schoolgirl Detective and Eccentric Author – Night Before The Murder Case at the Mansion of Antiquarian Books,**" acts as a prequel to the first song in the series, "Murder Case at the Mansion of Antiquarian Books," and follows the events between the schoolgirl detective who loves mystery novels, Hanamoto Hibari, and the extremely sadistic mystery novel writer, Kudou Renma.

The third part in this three-part novel is called: *Murder Case at the Ryougoku Haunted Mansion*.

“Hibari and Kudo head to Ryougoku on an errand for Kareshima, who runs an antique book store. Coincidentally, it’s also the Sumida River Fireworks Festival. To Hibari, it almost feels as if they’re on a date, but when they reach their destination, they discover the corpse of a shooting incident....”

This part is further divided into three chapters, so here’s the second one! Masterpost with links to all the translated chapters can be found [here](#).

[←Pt.3, Ch.1](#) | [Pt.3 Ch.3→](#)

* If you can, I highly encourage supporting the creators by buying the book for yourself at [Amazon!](#)

Chapter 2: It’s Reasoning! Reasoning!

I could hear the sound of camera shutters going off in the other room. People from the police department, most likely the forensics team, were probably taking pictures of the crime scene. Professor Nagao’s body must still be lying in that room.

Kudou-sensei and I sat in the room across from it, on the other side of that dimly-lit corridor, waiting for the detectives to arrive.

Even though we were in a different room now, I felt like the scent of blood was still in the air. No, actually, it felt like it was something else—

Was it those countless ghost pictures that made me feel this way? When I thought of it that way, I started to feel goosebumps on the nape of my neck.

Thankfully, there weren’t any ghost pictures in this room.

I was grateful for that fact. If possible, I didn’t want to see them now—

As I sat in a kneeling position on top of the seat cushion, I thought back to what had happened earlier.

“He’s dead.”

After Sensei had concluded that, he went to another room with Chigake-san, who was still very upset. Meanwhile, I borrowed their telephone and contacted the police.

When I returned to the room, Chigake-san seemed to have calmed down considerably, but her face was still pale.

After a while, several police officers and two detectives came, along with people from forensics. They took Sensei and I to the tatami room on the other side of the corridor and told us to wait here while they investigated the body and the crime scene.

“To think that you’d call the police while I wasn’t looking. How unnecessary,”

Sensei sat with his legs sprawled on the tatami and a very displeased look on his face. He made it sound as if he were the culprit here.

“Of course I’d call them. We might have a murder on our hands.”

“Couldn’t you have just solved it before calling the police? With those snappy, Schoolgirl Detective deduction skills of

yours. Isn't your mind just itching to get to the bottom of this?"

It clearly sounded like he was making fun of me.

I pouted and puffed out my cheeks. Seeing me make that face, Sensei laughed and said, "Look at Hibari's beak!" But, it was just as he said.

I really was itching.

To tell the truth, I have a troubling bad habit.

I have a weird habit of sticking my nose in whenever I came across an inexplicable case. If it were just about taking a peek, then there was nothing wrong with that. Just mere curiosity. That would make me a nosy onlooker at best, something that most everyone must be guilty of being now and then.

However, in my case, I always end up getting deeply involved in the case, and become obsessed with finding the reasoning.

I fully understand that this habit of mine never earns me much praise, but whenever I'm faced by mysterious events, some indescribable sense of duty looms over me like a fluffy thunderhead, and before I know it, I've immersed myself in trying to solve the mystery.

Thanks to that habit, if I were to include even minor incidents, I've encountered and been involved in numerous different cases.

"Just like that Cultural Festival incident in May," Sensei laughed while making a positively villainous face.

That's right, it had been the same back then, as well. Due to some certain opportunities lining up just right, I had found myself with the pieces that would lead me to the truth, and as a result, I had wound up running about the school during the lively Akebi Festival in order to solve the mystery.

I personally think that this habit of mine developed as a result of all the mystery and detective novels that I've read since my childhood.

Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, John Dickson Carr, Ellery Queen, Yokomizo Seishi, Unno Juza, Takagi Akimitsu. As well as Edogawa Ranpo.

I read each of their works obsessively, always regretting that I eventually had to sleep. I seriously hoped to meet Sherlock Holmes or Akechi Kogorou someday. I even wrote letters addressed to those great detectives. However, I had no idea where to address those letters, so I ended up sending them to my grandfather's house in Kita-Kamakura. Back then, that was the only address I knew.

I feel so bad when I think about how bewildered my grandfather must have been, at first ecstatic receive a letter from his granddaughter, only to find it addressed to "Mr. Holmes."

"I received one of those letters, as well."

"Ahhh! Throw that thing out right now! Burn it!"

In any case, that was why I always ended up getting worked up whenever I encounter these kinds of cases.

Speaking of which, my father once told me,

"Your mother, Tsukino, was like that, too."

Apparently my mother had had the same kind of weird habit. That would mean that it wasn't due to reading too many detective novels, but simply some strange gene that I had inherited from my mother. The more I thought about it, the less sense it made.

However, that didn't seem to mean I was particularly skilled at reasoning, and would sometimes be off the mark at crucial moments. According to Sensei, however, it wasn't just sometimes, but almost always.

Despite that, Sensei was very familiar with my tendency for reasoning, and would occasionally say things to incite me. But in reality, he had no expectations of me. He simply enjoyed watching me present the wrong answer after having struggled to come up with it.

"Go on then, tell us. Who could the culprit be?"

"Oh, please! How could we possibly know at this point?!"

"Oh? Are you saying we'll know once we have the right information, then? So you really do intend to challenge this mystery."

"Please don't lead the conversation in that direction! Sensei, you're always so.... Ah, my legs are numb!"

I tried to stand up, but I had trouble moving my legs.

"Ahaha!"

"You two seem to get along well,"

It was at that moment that Chikage-san appeared. She had a somewhat troubled-looking smile on her face.

"I've brought some refreshments."

"My apologies, Hibari-kun has been no help at all."

"Hold on, Sensei! What do you mean I.... Ah, but really, I feel like I should apologize, as well."

I bowed my head in shame while I massaged my numb feet. Meanwhile, Sensei gulped down the barley tea that had been brought out.

After walking around all day, I was also feeling terribly thirsty, but I refrained from reaching for the tea.

Someone had just died in the other room. It didn't feel like the right time to just be casually quenching our thirst.

Chikage-san appeared to have fully returned to her senses, but that didn't change the fact that she'd suddenly lost her father. She was sure to still be in a lot of turmoil on the inside.

Unable to stand this any longer, I looked down, and just then, there was the sound of frantic footsteps coming from the corridor.

"Chikage! Is it true that he's dead?!"

"Hey, what's with all this commotion?"

The pair that entered the room was a middle-aged woman wearing a white blouse and a somewhat short skirt, and a young man wearing a yukata. The two of them crowded around where Chikage-san was sitting and demanded an explanation for what was going on.

"Mother, Tetsuta...."

“Sis, what’s going on?! What’re all those cops doing out front....?!”

“Both of you, please listen to me—Father is.... Father is....”

Pausing now and then, Chikage-san became desperate as she explained the situation to the two that had shown up. Even just listening from the sidelines, her voice sounded like it was filled with so much sorrow that it made my chest hurt.

The two were introduced after the brief explanation.

“I apologize for the late introductions. I’m Nagao’s wife, Otoe. And this is our eldest son, Tetsuta,”

The wife said politely, and wiped her face lightly with a handkerchief. As the scent of her perfume hung in the air, she wiped at the sweat on her forehead, as if to avoid ruining her thick makeup.

I corrected my seating posture and also introduced myself.

“Oh my, so you’re here on an errand for the owner of that antique bookshop? Kokuudou, wasn’t it? He’s always so cool and good at talking. I quite like him.”

“Right....”

It seemed she was talking about Kareshima-san.

“Um, I’m not quite sure what to say about what’s happened to your husband today.... But, I think we should be hearing more details from the police soon.”

“But he’s never even been sick before. The neighborhood doctors even guaranteed how likely he was to live a long life.... How could this have happened....”

“More importantly, ma'am,”

While I had been careful with my words as I spoke, Sensei was just the opposite as he started speaking.

“It seems you were out of the house today due to work. Consulting on a new line of clothes you’re launching, I assume? And due to your time being taken up by work, you’ve been away from this house for quite a while now.”

“Y-yes, that’s right. I run a small business that deals with clothing. We were in the middle of negotiations today, but when I heard the news, I came home immediately.”

Sensei must have purposely brought up the topic of her work to cut off the wife’s gloomy talk. Judging from the wife’s tight-looking outfit that didn’t seem suited for summer, and the abnormal amount of clothes—far too many for a normal household—hanging in the corridors and corners of rooms, he must have assumed that her job had to be related to clothing.

“Came home immediately, huh? Are you sure about that? Weren’t you meeting with some bigshot client today?”

Her son next to her cut in teasingly.

“Well.... Yes, it was an important meeting, so I couldn’t leave right away....”

“Hmph. Whatever. I went to go see the fireworks with some guys, but I ran out of cash so I came back home to get some more. And then I saw all those cops around and I freaked,”

He said, even without being asked. He spoke like a delinquent, but there was an undeniable innocence in his eyes. It somehow sounded like he was purposely trying to speak roughly.

"Were you with that friend of yours again? I've heard some unpleasant rumors about that one. Are you sure it's alright being around him? Oh, speaking of which, you look a bit like Alain Delon."

In the middle of conversing with her son, this time, the wife started showing interest in Sensei.

"Or perhaps, Ichikawa Raizo? Are you an actor of some sorts? If you're interested, would you like to model for our advertisements?"

"Model?!"

I was so shocked by her remark that I cried out.

"U-um! He's....!"

I was too flustered to explain properly. However, Sensei responded without his smile wavering even the slightest bit.

"Thank you for the offer, ma'am. But I'm afraid I am but a faint-hearted man, and I suffer from a combination of palpitations, shortness of breath, and memory impairment when in front of large crowds of people. As such, normally I try to avoid the public eye as much as possible, but in spite of that, this unripe persimmon of a pigtailed girl, that's not even good for nibbling on, insists on forcing me to go everywhere with her. This violation of my human rights has gotten to be too much recently, so I'm prepared to fight it legally in court this time."

Unripe persimmon? Court? His story was just so ridiculous, I didn't even have the energy to object.

"Anyway, what do we do now? I can't believe he's dead.... We never finished talking about the money for rebuilding the company...."

The wife had quickly abandoned the topic that she herself had brought up and begun worrying about something else.

"Seriously, Mom? You're still worried about work at a time like this?"

"Now, I wouldn't say that...."

From the sounds of it, it didn't seem like the wife's company was doing too well.

"Speaking of which, Chikage, have you contacted Kuromine-san yet?"

The wife seemed to have gotten uncomfortable, and forcefully changed the topic. However, Chikage-san was too busy staring at the closed sliding door to hear her.

"Chigake, I'm talking to you," The wife called again, and finally, she looked this way.

"I'm sorry. I was distracted by the sound of the fireworks."

It certainly seemed like the fireworks were flourishing out front. Even for the people living in this town, was the sound really so distracting even after hearing them every year?

"If you mean Seiichi-san, then you don't need to worry."

"Seiichi-san?"

The wife casually answered my curiosity.

"My daughter's fiance."

As I reacted to hearing his name for the first time, the wife began talking happily, as if it were her own betrothed that she was speaking of.

“He’s a fine man that works at a newspaper company. My daughter was so excited to see the fireworks with him today while showing him around these parts. But after what’s just happened, I’m afraid that won’t be possible anymore.”

“It’s fine. Family is more important.”

“Oh, is that right? Yes, I suppose that’s true. You’re both still young, so you can always see the fireworks next year, and for many years more after that, too.”

Not long after that, two detectives noisily entered the room.

One was a middle-aged man with an stubble on his chin and a cigarette hanging from his mouth, as well as stern, piercing eyes that rivaled Sensei’s. The other detective looked much younger; he was tall and lanky, and seemed full of motivation, if nothing else, as he gripped a notepad and pen in his hands.

“I’m Innami from the Metropolitan Police’s First Investigation Division.”

The middle-aged man briefly showed us his police badge, if only for formality’s sake. His forearms showed slightly from his rolled-up sleeves.

Seeing Detective Innami take out his badge, the younger detective hurried to introduce himself, as well.

“I’m Kaburagi! I’m still new to the force, but I humbly ask—”

“What’s with all the ‘humble’ crap, idiot. What are you, a salaryman?”

The rookie detective introduced himself energetically, but he wilted when his senior scolded him. However, he lifted his head up immediately afterwards and scribbled something in his notepad.

“I am not.... a salaryman,”

He muttered as he wrote. Maybe every time his senior scolded him, he would record it in his notepad like so.

“Detective Guidelines” Number Sixty-Eight—I am not a salaryman. And so on.

“For the time being, we’ve done a brief survey of the scene of the crime as well as the area surrounding the mansion. Next, we’d like to interview the family members. Is everyone present?”

It looked like Detective Kaburagi was quick to recover. As soon as he finished speaking, Innami continued.

“I just want to make sure, but the first one to discover the scene was the daughter, correct?”

Chikage-san nodded silently to the question.

“You must be the eldest daughter, Nagao Chikage-san. Currently attending the local university,”

Detective Kaburagi added on next to him.

“And, the one who ran in after hearing her scream would be—”

“That was me, Hanamoto Hibari. I came to visit today on an errand.”

I unwrapped the bundle with the book to show them, and explained briefly to the detectives. Detective Kaburagi

quickly jotted things down in his notepad. Detective Innami had been narrowing his eyes the entire time, but finally, he looked behind me.

“And who would that rude-looking, poor-mannered man over there be?”

I slowly turned around. Naturally, there was no one else but Sensei. Instead of sitting properly, he was leaning against a pillar with his legs thrown out in front of him.

Ah, he didn't look happy at all.

Sensei hated being treated arrogantly by other people. It didn't matter who.

“Are you talking about me, old dog of the police force?”

“Let me correct myself. Who the hell is this rude-looking, poor-mannered, and foul-mouthed man?”

The atmosphere had suddenly turned hostile. I hurried to put myself between them.

“This is Kudou Renma-sensei! I know he seems to be just full of bad traits, but he's a writer! He came here today as my chaperone, so he hasn't done anything against the law! Probably!”

“My! So you're a writer!”

The wife responded happily for some reason. It really didn't seem like she had just lost her husband.

“A writer, huh?”

After giving Sensei a final look of disbelief, Detective Innami called to Detective Kaburagi.

“What's the scene of the crime look like?”

“Ah, yessir! Let's see, the one who died was the master of this house, Nasao Gensaku-san, aged fifty-four. He taught as a professor at Toyo University. The cause of death was brain damage due to a gunshot wound to the head. In other words, he was shot in the head with a bullet. According to the forensics team, the estimated time of death was somewhere between six to seven PM.”

“Father was.... shot dead by someone?!”

“Chikage-san, were you at home during that time?”

“No, I had gone out for a bit. I believe I left around six. I got caught up in a bit of small talk at a nearby friend's house, and wound up staying longer than I had planned, so I hurried on my way home.”

“And that was when you discovered your father's body.”

“Yes.... Um, am I being considered as a suspect....?”

“Miss, please calm down. We're just checking the facts to be sure,”

Detective Kaburagi spoke softly to Chikage-san as she started to get upset, and led her into another room. He must have realized it was cruel to keep asking her these questions so soon after the girl had lost her father.

Meanwhile, Detective Innami continued talking.

“When Professor Nagao was discovered, he was holding a rifle in his hand. Is that correct?”

I nodded in place of Chikage-san. The body had certainly been holding onto a rifle.

“It was a bolt-action rifle known as a Type 99 Rifle, the kind used by the army during the war. A 7.7mm caliber. The bullet that entered Professor Nagao’s temporal region exited from around the top of his head and fell onto the tatami mats. The impact of the shot must have forced his head to turn sideways. When we examined the bullet, we confirmed that it was also fired from a 7.7mm caliber rifle. A part of the bullet lost its shape after it was fired, so it might take some time to identify the ballistic markings on it, but considering the nature of the crime scene, that probably won’t be necessary. Now, about the rifle—”

Detective Innami looked over at the wife.

“Yes, that gun is from my husband’s collection. That’s always been a hobby of his. He’s collected several other guns, as well.”

“According to Chikage-san’s testimony, when she discovered the body, the room was, for the most part, closed off aside for one part of the sliding panels. The deceased was holding a gun from his own collection, and there were also traces of gunpowder residue found on his body. In other words—”

“It was most likely a suicide. Slim chance of it being murder.”

Sensei said, as if to steal the words right from the detective’s mouth. Detective Innami raised an eyebrow and made a blatantly displeased face.

“...Well, that’s what it is. He probably pulled the trigger at his own head while he was alone in that room.”

“Why.... To think that he would commit suicide....”

The wife dabbed her eyes with a handkerchief.

“That old man.... But Detective, my old man couldn’t have committed suicide. He didn’t have any reason to. He had guts, and he was immersed in his research. There’s no way he would just thrown away his life like that,”

Tetsuta-san insisted, but it wasn’t enough to make Detective Innami’s change his mind.

“Right now, there doesn’t seem to be any other possibility. But, we’ll try investigating a little more.”

A heavy atmosphere enveloped the room. Suddenly, Sensei stood up as if he had just thought of something. As everyone, myself included, looked up in wonder, Sensei began walking around opening all the doors as if to do away with the heavy, tepid atmosphere lingering in the room.

“Hey, what do you think you’re doing?! You can’t just—”

“Hot, it’s hot! It makes me hot being shut in like this. Moreover, it’s a shame to have the doors closed when there are such beautiful fireworks going off outside!”

Sensei continued opening doors until he reached the back of Professor Nagao’s room. Thankfully, the body had already been moved elsewhere, but there were still the fresh bloodstains on the tatami mats.

He opened the sliding panels facing the veranda, as well. Our field of vision widened, and beyond it, we could see the fireworks spreading out into the night sky.

Sensei stood at the veranda for a while, gazing outside. Had he really discovered a love for fireworks somewhere in his heart? No, it couldn’t be.

“That’s better.”

Finally seeming satisfied, he sat back down in his original spot.

But even the wind that blew into the room felt tepid. It had that distinct, summer evening dampness. Furthermore, because Sensei had opened up the panels leading to the back room, I could see those creepy ghost pictures again, which made me start to feel uncomfortable.

No matter where they were, all the ghosts seemed to be staring in our direction, giving me strange chills.

Detective Innami seemed unsettled by the ghost pictures as well, and avoided looking at them directly.

"Come to think of it, I've heard that people around here call this house a haunted mansion. Well, with all of *those* lined up there, I can see why—"

He relentlessly squashed a mosquito that had landed on his neck.

"It was another of my old man's hobbies. And one in bad taste. He didn't care at all about public appearances. Lately, there've even been people saying that real ghosts show up. It's sickening!"

Tetsuta-san cursed as he answered. I see, the detective said before continuing.

"Your father's hobby, huh? Well, that thing about real ghosts appearing is probably just an exaggerated rumor, but at this rate, it almost makes you think that there might actually be one...."

"Innami-san!"

Detective Kaburagi suddenly shouted from the room that the professor's body had been in.

"What's wrong?"

"We found it! From the chest in the room!"

"What did you find?"

"The suicide note!"

*

"This is my husband's, Gensaku's handwriting, without a doubt...."

The suicide note that was found had been written by Professor Nagao, and was extremely short and concise.

A heart that pursues mystery is what makes a heart truly human. The same can be said for this world and the next; there is nothing more mysterious in this world than humans. As I ponder over souls and the afterlife day in and day out, the more I long to see it for myself. My dearest wife, please forgive your husband for taking his own life and going on ahead. My dearest children, do not despair. Your father is going now to the endless world he years for. I will return to see the camellias in the garden again next year.

"He longed to see the afterlife....? What is this?"

Detective Innami said, but refrained from saying any more in respect for the bereaved family.

"Father was a bit strange," Chikage-san spoke up as she returned from the other room.

"All he ever did was think about his research."

"I heard about that earlier, too. About how he immersed himself in it. What kind of research did he do, anyway?"

“To put it simply, ‘ghosts.’”

“Ghosts....” Detective Innami repeated the word while making a face like he didn’t quite understand what that meant.

“Yes. Ghosts, souls, the afterlife, spiritual channeling, curses.... There were times when he was so devoted to his research, he would even forget to eat or sleep.”

“And was all *this* also a part of that?”

Detective Innami pointed out the ghost paintings on the walls.

“Our house has always been full of things like that. My late grandfather was a fan of antiques, so he collected various things over the years. Vases, musical instruments, swords, paintings.... Famous things, obscure things, strange things, things with a history behind them—he collected all sorts. And among them were those ghost paintings. Apparently, my father was very attracted to them as a child.”

He had already been drawn in by ghosts since a young age. If that was the case, it made sense why he had been so passionate for his research on ghosts. The same could be said for his gun collection; his habit for collecting things had most likely been taken from his own father.

“After my grandfather passed away, we let go of most of his antique collection, so not much of it remains—”

As she said this, she looked at Otoe-san. Naturally, everyone followed her gaze and focused on the wife. Having not expected this sudden attention, Otoe-san forced a laugh while hiding her mouth with her handkerchief.

“Y-yes, well, there were some necessary expenses in forming the company, you see.Hohoho.”

In other words, it looked like she had sold everything for finances to use for her own company.

“The ghost paintings were the only things my father refused to let go of. In fact, he kept collecting even more of them, no matter how much they cost. It was as if he was possessed by something.”

“By something....?”

Once again, I felt chills.

“By ghosts, of course,”

Sensei said while still facing the veranda. Detective Kaburagi rubbed his forearms as he looked around the room.

“You’re not saying he could have been killed by ghosts, are you....?”

“Idiot! And you still call yourself a detective?! And as for you, Mr. Writer, don’t just go running your mouth! Anyway, now that we’ve found the note written by the man himself, this is definitely suicide. Our job here is just about done.”

“No, they exist.”

“Huh? What exists? If you keep on spouting nonsense—”

“A culprit exists,”

Sensei said while staring blankly into space. Everyone in the room could take a guess at what he was implying.

“I can see them. Even now, I see them. The culprit. Over there, and over here.”

“What, are you a spirit medium as well as a writer? Quit making things up in front of the bereaved!”

Detective Innami looked ready to lunge at Sensei at any moment now.

“He’s right, Sensei. Now isn’t the time to be joking around like that. There’s no such thing as....”

No such thing as ghosts. They couldn’t possibly exist.

But as soon as I glanced at the walls, they were all around us. Even now, they were looking at us. Watching us.

I’m scared. So scared. *So scared.*

“Oh, dear,”

Suddenly, Sensei began to pay close attention to his sleeve in a theatrical manner.

“I tried to be careful when I was checking the professor’s pulse, but it looks some blood has gotten on it. Hibari-kun, would hand washing be enough to take out this stain?”

There was, indeed, a small red stain on his sleeve.

“Ah! You’re right! I’m the one that’s always doing the laundry, so please be more careful! In the first place, you’re always so careless, letting the laundry pile up like that, Sensei—”

Wait, no!

What was I saying in front of everyone? As I realized the situation, my face started heating up like a boiling kettle. I quickly got back on topic to cover up my embarrassment.

“W-well, with all that blood, it would be hard not to get any of it on you, no matter how careful you are,”

As soon as I said this, I had a certain misgiving. Just like how the fireworks lit up the darkness, the fact that something was odd had come to my attention.

I rethought the situation with that in mind, and realized that several things didn’t line up.

Then, that would mean that this was—

“Hm? Hibari-kun, what’s the matter? Oh! Could it be?!”

“Hey, Writer, what’s gotten into you all of a sudden?! What’s wrong with this girl now?”

“Shh! Be quiet. Look closely. Hibari-kun’s pigtails are standing on end! It’s a sign that she’s come up with some sort of idea.”

It was my first time hearing of that kind of sign. In the first place, it wasn’t possible for my pigtails to stand up on their own. I was about to protest against Sensei’s gibberish, but decided to focus on sorting out my own thoughts, first.

“Um, who is this girl, really?”

“I’m glad you asked, Newbie Kaburagi-kun. This girl here who seems to be hiding something—she may not look like it, but she’s the talented Schoolgirl Detective that’s everyone in Kanda has been going on about recently. Up until now, she’s solved a countless number of cases by correctly guessing the culprit each time. The number of men she’s turned down is also too many to count.”

“The Schoolgirl Detective?!”

The conversation was escalating by the moment, but right now, I had to concentrate—

“Reasoning comes first, seconds comes snacks. Thinking for three hours while surrounded by foes on all four sides, with all five senses mixed up in a mystery-solving pilgrimage. Even if she falls down seven times while deducting, she gets up eight. And while pursuing the culprit, though nine may die, she alone survives. And at ten, she’s finally a ‘great’ detective! With today’s case, as well, she’s certain to uncover the truth without fail. A bull’s-eye, every time! Once she starts to focus like this, there’s no labyrinth she cannot escape. No culprit she cannot find!”

“Sensei, that’s enough praise, thank you!” I said, standing up to interrupt Sensei’s little play. Although, I had a feeling that most of that wasn’t actually praise.

“Well then, Great Detective, do you see some light of hope now?”

Everyone was looking at me with serious expressions on their faces. Behind them, only Sensei was smiling in amusement.

Fine, then. In that case, I’ll do it.

I’ll solve this mystery.

“The professor didn’t commit suicide. There’s definitely a culprit.”

Detective Kaburagi was the first to respond to my statement.

“What’s that? You said your name was Hibari-chan, wasn’t it? I don’t know if you’re actually a detective or not, but what you’re saying is—”

“The professor was killed, by someone.”

“That can’t be—!”

This time it was Chikage-san who cried out in a hoarse voice and staggered, knocking over the tea cup by her hand.

“Listen, didn’t you just see his suicide note for yourself?”

“Hold on, Kaburagi. Girly, you’ve gotta have some conclusive evidence for you to be claiming that, right?”

“Innami-san! You can’t possibly think that what this kid is saying is true!”

“I don’t, but she was one of the first people on the scene, after all, so I’ll hear what she has to say, at least. Well, Miss Schoolgirl Detective? What’s your reasoning here?”

“I haven’t solved all the mysteries here just yet, however, there’s something unusual about treating this as a suicide. For starters, his motive,”

I tried to speak slowly and clearly as I organized the thoughts in my head. I treaded carefully onwards, as if I was using a lamp to illuminate the dark path before me.

“The professor had been desperately waiting to get his hands on a certain book. That would be the book that I came here with today, ‘Study of Ghosts and Souls.’”

I undid the bundle I was holding again to show them the book.

“It would seem that he asked Kareshima-san, the owner of ‘Kokuudou,’ to sell him this book as soon as he had it in stock. And when Kareshima-san called him about it yesterday, he requested that it be brought to him as soon as possible. Would he really commit suicide, knowing that he was about to receive the book he had wanted for so

long?”

Detective Innami said nothing in response to my question. He looked like he was still reserving judgement.

After a sufficient pause, I continued.

“Next, I’d like to talk about the type of gun he used. I’m not very well-informed on guns, but the gun he used wasn’t a pistol like you might see in Western movies, but a rifle, wasn’t it? The ones with a rather long barrel.”

“Yeah, Professor Nagao was holding a short rifle, but the entire length of the gun is still over a meter long.”

“Assuming he did commit suicide, why would he have chosen that gun?”

As I spoke, I moved to the professor’s room. Various types of guns adorned the walls. It was chilling to see all those guns lined up right next to the ghost paintings.

“Please take a look. Among the professor’s collection, there are small pistols here, as well. Using one of these would surely suffice for committing suicide, so why would he have specifically chosen a gun with such a long barrel? Wouldn’t it be more difficult to aim at his head and pull the trigger by himself?”

“Well.... I don’t know the reason, either, but.... When committing suicide with a rifle, there’s a way to point the muzzle at yourself while hooking your foot on the trigger. You’d pull the trigger with your toes. During the war, there were quite a few soldiers that killed themselves that way. So it wouldn’t be impossible to pull off.”

“You’re right, it wouldn’t be impossible. However, if he had shot himself using that method, the bullet would have gone into him from the front, wouldn’t it? However, the entry wound on the body was found on the temple. Isn’t he facing the wrong way to have shot himself? That seems kind of strange.”

“Maybe he was looking at the fireworks, or something,”

Detective Innami said, but I could tell right away that he wasn’t saying it seriously.

“The professor had to have been shot by someone else from the opposite direction. And he must have been caught by surprise.”

“Are you saying someone entered the house in the middle of this busy fireworks festival, shot him, and then disappeared like a fine mist?”

“If it was someone from within the house, that wouldn’t have been too difficult, I think.”

“So one of the family members is the culprit?”

Hearing these words, both the wife and Tetsuta-san gasped.

“It’s too early to conclude that, but.... First, let’s do a verification.”

“A verification?”

“Otoe-san, Tetsuta-san, what time did you two leave the house today?”

Instead of directly answering Detective Innami’s question, I asked the two of them a question of my own.

“You would suspect me, his wife?! Why, how absurd!”

The wife, Otoe, yelled with her face as red as a steamed apple.

"I'm sorry. It's just part of the procedure."

"Hmph! I left the house at around seven AM to go to work! If you don't believe me, you can ask the people at my company."

"I waited for the rain to stop before heading to my friend's place! That was probably a little after three. I'll ask someone to come over and prove it if you don't believe me!"

"Thank you for your cooperation. That means that while Chikage-san had gone out, the professor was the only one in this house. It lines up with his estimated time of death. If someone broke into the house during that time...."

As I spoke, I went out onto the veranda. It was opposite of the rear garden where Sensei was.

With that in mind, I looked around for Sensei, but he wasn't where he had been a moment ago. He wasn't anywhere within my field of vision. Where had he gone off to? As I thought this, Detective Innami came up to me.

"An intruder from outside? But this house is surrounded by a garden. And as you can see, the ground's all muddy because of the shower this afternoon. I had my subordinates do a thorough search, but they didn't find any suspicious footprints. Actually, there weren't any footprints in the garden at all. We only found Chikage-san's footprints from when she went in and out of the back door. And also, the eldest son's footprints leading to the front entrance. As well as yours, and that writer's, from when you came to visit, but that's it."

"....That means that no outsiders came into this house after it rained."

"But everyone in the house has an alibi. Who could have possibly killed the professor, then? Are you trying to say that since it's a haunted mansion, some obake appeared out of thin air to kill him, and then vanished without leaving a trace?"

"Um,"

Detective Kaburagi raised his hand.

"Aren't there ways to break in without leaving any footprints? For example, what if they used the roof of the neighboring house?"

"If we were to investigate, I'm sure we would find other ways they could have broken in. However, we're right next to the Sumida River, and today's the Ryougoku River-Opening. The streets are flooded with people here to see the fireworks. If someone had tried to break in using atypical methods under these conditions, I think they would be noticed right away."

"Ah.... You have a point."

He turned downcast in disappointment, but straightened up almost immediately and looked up again.

"What if they prepared in advance the same type of footwear as someone who had left behind their footprints here, and entered the premises that way?"

"Prepared in advance? It wouldn't have been possible to predict it would rain today, and especially right before the crime. It would have been easier to commit the crime on a day where it didn't rain. There would be no footprints left behind, either."

"I suppose.... that wouldn't be very realistic."

Once again, he slumped dejectedly. Just a moment ago, he had been insisting it was a suicide. Whose side was he on, really?

“Um.... But when I left my father behind and went out of the house, I made sure to lock up both the front and the back door,”

Chikage-san cut in to add.

“Although, as for the veranda, the sliding door had been closed, but not the glass door, so that was the only entrance that wasn’t locked.”

Naturally, there weren’t any locks on the paper sliding doors.

“The veranda.... The entrance facing the garden, then. But....”

Detective Kaburagi crossed his arms and didn’t say any more. It had been none other than the police who had confirmed that no footprints had been found in the garden.

“It’s unlikely that they could have broken in through the veranda or anywhere else, isn’t it?”

I let out a huge sigh. At this rate, the possibility of an outsider breaking in had all but disappeared.

Detective Innami watched us in silence before clapping his hands a few times and speaking up.

“Alright, you get it now, don’t you? There was no outsider in this. Professor Nagao pulled the trigger on himself while he was alone in this house.”

His tone sounded urgent. He probably wanted to put an end to this case already.

“No, if there was no outsider, then that leaves only the family. On the contrary, we’ve narrowed down the suspects.”

“Hey, weren’t you the one that just confirmed their alibis?!”

“That was only their testimonies, rather than a confirmation. Also, that was a verification done before I had considered the possibility of an outsider. However, that possibility doesn’t seem very likely anymore.”

“Tch....”

Detective Innami was clearly annoyed. His lips were turned in a frown, and there were wrinkles at his forehead. However, I didn’t budge. I wasn’t looking at one of Sensei’s displeased faces, which was like a knife polished daily for the sake of appearances.

“Then, are you saying that one of the people who left behind footprints, Nagao Chikage or Tetsuta, is the culprit?”

“It wasn’t me! I didn’t do it!”

Tetsuta-san shrunk back on himself as Innami glared at him.

“Tetsuta, since you’ve been doing nothing but fool around after dropping out of school, recently your father had been scolding you for stealing money from the house....”

As she spoke, the wife slowly walked a few steps away from her son.

“So you were at odds with your father over money issues?”

Meanwhile, Detective Kaburagi moved in closer to Tetsuta-san.

“Alright, so I *did* pester him a bit over cash. And my old man got pissed at me because of it! But that doesn’t mean I’d take out my own parent just for that!”

"But that doesn't mean you were completely without a motive, right?"

"O-oh, come on...."

Detective Kaburagi continued advancing blatantly on the eldest son.

"Hold on a minute, Detective. There's still something I'd like to confirm with Chikage-san."

"Huh? With Chikage-san?"

I looked over at her where she stood behind her mother and younger brother.

"Chikage-san, there's been something on my mind since we met."

"Y-yes?"

Hearing Chikage-san's reply, the wife and Tetsuta-san moved to the side as if to open up a path leading to her. We heard several fireworks go off in succession from outside.

"That's a very pretty yukata you're wearing."

"—Eh?"

Chikage-san looked down at the yukata she was wearing with a bewildered look on her face.

"Th-thank you very much."

"Lily of the valley flowers against a white background. I think the design looks refreshing and suits you very much. Is it one of your favorite outfits?"

"Hey, what's going on here?! Why are suddenly talking about yukata?! Is that all you wanted to ask?"

Detective Innami cut in, seemingly unable to contain himself. However, I ignored him and went on.

"But that color would make any stains really stand out, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, that's true. I try to be extra careful not to get it dirty."

"Like, for instance, a red stain?"

"Eh—? Um.... I'm sorry, what did you just say?"

"Hey, Pigtail Detective. Make it so the rest of us can understand, too. Just what are you getting at?"

Detective Innami started to pester me again.

"Detective, think about it. The first one to discover the professor's body was his daughter, Chikage-san. After hearing her scream, Sensei and I ran into the room where the body was. And once we did, we saw her standing motionless next to the body. The sun was setting, and the sliding doors were shut, leaving the room in a dimly-lit state."

"Yeah, I've already heard about this when I asked her how she found the body. What about it?"

"At the time, Sensei immediately went up to the body to check for a pulse. And that was when Chikage-san said this. 'It was no use. Father is already dead....'"

"That was because he didn't respond no matter how much I shook him, and I had already checked for a pulse, as well,"

Chikage-san said with a confused expression and looked away.

“After clinging desperately to your father, who was lying in a pool of blood, and checking for any signs of life, you already knew he was dead. That’s what you mean, correct?”

Chikage-san’s face was a mixture of confusion and annoyance at the way I spoke with emphasis.

“Yes, that’s what I’m trying to say.”

“Then why is it so clean? *Why isn’t there any blood to be found anywhere on your yukata ?*”

“Th-that’s because—”

“If you found your father bleeding so much in that dimly-lit room, I think that normally, you would be in a state of panic, and it would be hard to keep your composure. It would be extremely difficult to remain calm.”

As I spoke, I tried imagining my own father in that situation, but it was clear that it darkened my mood, so I stopped.

“In reality, Chikage-san actually did scream loud enough to be heard throughout the mansion, so if she reacted normally enough to do so, she must have then rushed to her father’s side. And naturally, some part of her would get dirty with blood. Even Sensei got blood on his sleeve despite being so careful. Honestly, who does he think has to do the laundry—”

Anyway, that wasn’t important right now.

“That would especially be the case when you’re wearing a yukata. Unless you were extremely careful, the hem would almost definitely touch the blood that’s on the tatami mats. But despite this, there isn’t even a spot of blood on Chikage-san’s yukata. It’s completely clean.”

This time, everyone in the room focused their gazes on Chikage-san’s untainted, flower-patterned yukata.

“I.... I’m....!”

Chikage-san fell to her knees on the spot, trembling.

Feeling that the time for what needed to be said had finally come, I took a deep breath and stood proudly.

“Chikage-san, you didn’t even touch your father at the time. You had no need to touch him in order to check if he was still alive. The reason being that the one who killed him, is none other than you—”

That was when it happened.

“Indeed, it really is lively out there! You can just feel the excitement in the air!”

“None other than you.... yourself....”

It had happened completely out of nowhere. Of all people, Sensei had come bursting into the room. And he seemed to be in very good spirits, at that.

“Japanese people are usually so meek, but as soon as there’s a festival going on, they became so energetic it’s like they’ve become an entirely differently person. I wonder why that is! Do they become more easy-going when partying openly in a group? It might be embarrassing to let loose on their own, but when everyone else around them is doing the same, then that’s no longer the case—that kind of late-blooming, Japanese-like chain reaction is like just being able to order anmitsu without feeling embarrassed only because the man sitting next to you is eating it himself! Isn’t

that exactly what's going on with middle-aged salarymen rejoicing in chains of cafés?! What a racket they make!"

"Hold it, Sensei?! Where is this coming from all of a sudden?! What you're saying isn't even making sense anymore! No, that's not what matters here—I was in the middle of something important—!"

And right at the climax, too! Why?! How could he?!

"Aha! Look, Hibari-kun's precious pigtails are standing on end like a hedgehog!"

"Excuse me! Just now, I was about to say something very, very important as a detective.... It's like if I was singing 'Song of Apples' and I was just about to get to the line, 'Apples are cute~ What cute apples~'—In any case, I was getting to the most important part....!"

"Why, you're still at it? You were talking for so long, I got bored. So I decided to go for a little stroll."

"B-bored?! It's reasoning! Reasoning! And first of all—"

Sensei, you were the one that pushed the role of a detective on me. Somehow, I refrained from saying this.

"Reasoning? Hibari-kun, there you go again, pulling your little pranks. To think that you would purposely say things that aren't true in order to throw off the detectives."

"Things that aren't true....? What?! They're aren't?!"

I rushed up to Sensei to whisper to him,

"What do you mean?! C-could it be that.... my reasoning is wrong?!"

"Let's see now, it's as wrong as if you wanted to go to Tokyo Station but confidently got off at Yotsuya."

In other words, it seemed that I had been completely off the mark.

"Kuuu....!"

"No need to sound like a puppy who's run into a pole. You were headed in the right direction. All that's left now is to keep stumbling forward,"

Sensei whispered, before letting me go.

Sensei's intrusion had changed the entire atmosphere in an instant, leaving everyone present completely dumbfounded.

At last, Detective Kaburagi spoke up very carefully.

"Um, speaking of which, who might this be?"

He pointed to someone standing right beside Sensei.

That's right, Sensei had brought with him a woman I had never seen before. She was a plump, healthy-looking woman in her mid-twenties. Sensei grinned and placed a hand on her shoulder.

"This is Michiyo-chan."

"....Who?"

"Like I said, Michiyo-chan, who lives in the neighborhood. Twenty-four years old and single. Works at a textile

factory. And her favorite actor?”

“Tsuruta Kouji!”

“So it would seem.”

The woman called Michiyo-chan looked up at Sensei with a blushing face. But Tsuruta Kouji and Sensei looked nothing alike.

“Michiyo-san is my conversation friend. She’s the daughter of the house I went to earlier this evening....”

Having finally calmed down, Chikage-san timidly introduced her.

“Earlier, Kudou-sensei asked who I got caught up chatting with, so I told him.”

“The police didn’t seem like they were going to investigate it, so I went myself to kill some time.”

Is that what he had been doing while I’d been presenting my reasoning?

“Michiyo-chan was kind enough to cooperate with me. Incidentally, her chatting session with Chikage-san went like so. Michiyo-san saw Chikage-san walking in front of her house in the evening and called out to her. They started engaging in small talk, and then went to sit at the veranda to talk at length. About the new movie premiering this month, and the young man from work that Michiyo-chan has been interested in lately, and so on.”

“Oh, Sudou-san, cut that out! You promised you wouldn’t tell!”

Michiyo-chan covered her face with both hands in embarrassment. Wait, more importantly, who was Sudou-san? Well, it was probably Sensei, who had jokingly given some fake introduction.

“So then, Michiyo-chan, do you remember until what time you chatted with Chikage-san?”

“Yes, I met with Chikage-san a little after six. And after a while, the fireworks started going off, so we commented on how pretty they were again this year and talked a little longer. We parted ways after that. I never know when to stop talking once I get going—”

“What time do the fireworks start?”

Detective Innami stepped forward to interrupt Michiyo-chan, and asked this question while tapping his watch.

“Umm.... I believe they started at seven. It’s written on the flyers around town, too.”

She took a step back and answered. It seemed like she was a bit afraid of Detective Innami.

“Isn’t that right, Chikage-san? Wasn’t it at seven?”

“Yes. It was around seven twenty when I returned home.”

Sensei gave a small nod.

“And immediately after that would be when Hibari-kun nonchalantly came to visit this house. With that carefree face of hers all excited over the fireworks. All while humming something out-of-tune.”

“What do you mean nonchalantly?!”

“Um! But then wouldn’t this mean that Chikage-san....”

This time it was Detective Kaburagi who interrupted my protest by raising his hand. I pouted with my cheeks puffed out, but no one paid any attention to me. Hmph.

"Yes, Chikage-san had an alibi during the time of the crime. Michiyo-chan testified to that just now. This woman of affairs, Michiyo-chan just did!"

"I see. Which means?"

Detective Kaburagi listened to Sensei talk as he wrote in his notebook again. Maybe he was writing down something like, "Michiyo-chan—woman of affairs."

"Well? What *does* that mean? Hibari-kun."

Although it was Sensei who had been asked for the conclusion, he suddenly turned to me to ask for an answer. I panicked, as if I had been handed the pen in the middle of him writing a manuscript.

"I-it means.... Um, umm.... Oh, that's right! It means that the culprit who murdered Professor Nagao is someone else!"

I declared proudly in continuation to what I'd been trying to say earlier. Everyone stared at me as if drawn in by my words. Somehow, I started to feel bad.

"Just who is the real culprit?! Please just tell us already!"

Detective Kaburagi came closer to me as if begging for forgiveness for something. For some reason, he'd even started speaking to me in formal language.

"Uhh...."

I was stumped. What was I supposed to say?

The fireworks would soon be reaching their climax, but as for my reasoning, it was going astray.

I had hit a dead end.

"Um, why don't we take a break? I'll go make a fresh brew of tea. Oh, that's right, we have some delicious peaches, as well. Chikage, would you help peel them?"

It was then that the wife made a suggestion. To me, they sounded like words of salvation. The wife, Otoe, was a surprisingly positive and adaptable person; it almost made me feel a bit envious.

In any case, this bought me some time to think. I had to use this chance to find some kind of clue.

"Thank you for your help. Be careful not to be hit on by any of the fireworks spectators on your way back."

"Oh, Sudou-san!"

Sensei was cheerfully waving his hand as he saw Michiyo-chan off at the back door.

I grabbed Sensei's hand to pull him away to the end of the corridor.

"Why, a girl leading a man into a dark place like this? How disgraceful,"

Sensei said as he patted my head a few times.

"Be quiet! More importantly, Sensei, you really enjoyed misleading me again, didn't you! I was almost about to treat

Chikage-san like a criminal!"

"Then didn't I come in at the perfect timing to prevent that from happening?"

I couldn't deny that his timing had been impeccable.

The two detectives had sat down cross-legged on the floor, so Chikage-san was directing them to seat cushions, instead. After being cleared from being a suspect at the last moment, it looked like she was finally able to attend to the guests again.

I'm sorry for suspecting you! I apologized repeatedly in my head while curling up like a pillbug.

"Now then, you've come this far. The truth is just a step away."

"But.... I've come to a dead end. I can't think of anyone else who could have done it...."

I had lost all the clues. I felt like a mountain climber surrounded by a thick fog.

"For a detective, the truth won't always be somewhere immediately within reach,"

Sense said, before pushing me in the back.

"But that aside, we finally have time for a break. Why not enjoy the fireworks from the veranda for a while?"

"....What's gotten into you all of a sudden? Somehow, everything you say right now sounds fishy, Sensei."

"Ahaha,"

Even as he laughed, he kindly escorted me to the veranda. Being treated this way made me feel as if I might lose my mind.

Yes, from time to time, Sensei shows a caring side to him. And for some reason, it frustrates me.

There had been a time where I'd gone to deliver coffee beans to Sensei's house as usual, but fallen and sprained my ankle on the way. That time, Sensei had actually carried me inside without making fun of me like he usually did. He even told me to rest for a while, and bandaged up my ankle for me.

Of course, all while he was carrying me, I had struggled violently like a wild fox caught in a foothold trap.

I remember screaming things like, "I bet you're just going to ruthlessly drop me on the floor when I least expect it!" and "You're planning on scraping my cheeks with your beard which you haven't shaved since yesterday, aren't you!"

However, in the end, he had let me rest without any malice or ulterior motive, leaving things feeling rather anticlimactic.

Afterwards, when I told Kareshima-san about this, he pitied me by saying, "Just how terribly does he treat you on a daily basis?"

I was fine with being pitied. Because in reality, he really did treat me terribly. I'd become immune to it after so many years of being together, but in any case, from an outsider's point of view, the way Sensei treats me is unreasonably merciless.

Our relationship is that of a pitiful resident of Hell and its tormenting demon. On the other hand, it was completely natural that I was continually wary towards Sensei, much like a wild fox.

Despite all that, there were times where he would kindly hold out his hand to me like this. Just that alone was

enough to make me forget about all the ways he'd bullied me up until now, and I wound up taking his hand.

"What a dirty way to pull a prank....!"

"What are you mumbling to yourself about? Did you drop a thousand grams of your brain somewhere?"

"That's practically all of it!"

In the end, we went at it as we always did as we looked out at the garden from the veranda.

The forensics that had been searching the crime scene had left by now, and the Nagao household was somewhat quiet again.

Still, the Ryougoku River-Opening fireworks from outside were at their climax, and the air was filled with excitement, as if to convey that this was the epitome of a Japanese summer.

The camellia hedges just barely blocked out all of that excitement, protecting the calm atmosphere of the garden. The image of the hedges covered with winter flowers, looking up at the summer flowers in the sky was almost like something on a picture postcard.

"Huh? Only that part doesn't seem to be doing so well."

I saw that just one section of the hedges was in poor condition. Actually, it seemed on the verge of wilting. It was even shorter than I was. Seeing it standing there all spindly-looking and being looked down upon by the neighboring hedges made me feel a bit sympathetic.

Another firework exploded in the air.

"Poor Professor Nagao.... He must have died with so much regret,"

As I gazed up at the night sky, those words slipped out of my mouth.

"I mean, of course, I'm not trying to say I understand the deceased's feelings, but to suddenly be murdered right before the start of this beautiful fireworks show.... And he was never able to obtain the book he wanted for so long, either...."

The book that I'd brought was sitting in the corner of room, wrapped up in its cloth. It felt a bit late to just be realizing it now, but it looked so lonely there that it made my chest hurt.

Sensei waited for a large firework to finish going off and disappear before he spoke.

"I can understand the pain of leaving this world before being able to read the book he yearned for so dearly, but I'm not sure I would say the same about the fireworks."

"What do you mean?"

"Considering the estimated time of death, there's a possibility that the professor managed to see the fireworks in his final moments. It isn't certain that he was killed before they went off."

"....Ah, then in that case, I guess that means he was able to see them for at least a little—"

I started to say, but then I paused.

"Wait, could the culprit have waited until the fireworks started because he took pity on him....?"

No, that kind of romantic culprit couldn't possibly exist. Sensei would just make fun of me again for thinking

something so naive. With that in mind, I looked up at him, but Sensei looked surprisingly impressed.

“Good observation. That’s right, he couldn’t do it before the fireworks went off. It would have been inconvenient for him if it was before.”

“He couldn’t do it before they went off? So he waited until the fireworks started.... Then, that means.... Ah!”

“Have you figured it out? It’s quite simple if you think about it.”

When I remembered the murder weapon, the reason really was quite simple.

“It was so he could cover up the sound of the gunshot! The culprit fired hoping that it would sound like the fireworks that were going off nearby!”

The fireworks were being set up right nearby. And ever since I had entered this house, I could physically feel the volume and intensity of the sound they gave off.

“Correct. The gunshot. The professor died from being shot in the head, without a doubt. And he was holding a gun. The bullet lines up with that, and gunpowder residue was found, as well. Also, the estimated time of death is rather solid. Because of those facts, no one thought much of it. The gunshot. Its whereabouts remained unknown. Where could the gunshot have disappeared to? Where was it hidden?”

“The gunshot was hidden by the fireworks.”

“That changes things, then. Now, you’re able to see things you weren’t able to before, and come up with new reasoning.”

I thought long and hard as I fiddled with my braids.

“If you only proceed in a straight line like a bullet from a pistol, you’ll soon hit a wall. Widen your field of vision and look at the case from another angle. You might be able to find another way through.”

Because of the timing, he was able to make the gunshot sound vanish. Then, that meant—

There was a pair of sandals on the stepping stone by the veranda. I called to Detective Innami from the other side of the room.

“Detective, is it alright to go into the garden now?”

“Yeah, we’ve already finished looking around, so as long as you don’t touch anything, it’s fine.”

“Thank you. Chikage-san, may I use these sandals?”

After hearing a reply from her, I stepped into the sandals and went down into the garden.

I could feel the muddiness of the ground through the shoes. I tiptoed over to the wilting camellia and stared at it intensely. I carefully took in what I could see beyond it, as well.

Afterwards, I hurried back inside the mansion, and called out to Detective Innami, who was sitting down and about to reach for the peaches that had been brought out.

“Where did everyone else go?”

“They went back to the kitchen.”

Full of motivation, I headed for the kitchen. There, the members of the Nagao family were talking with docile looks on

their faces. It sounded like they were discussing about the funeral, about what would happen to the house from now on, and soon.

“Oh, would you like more tea?”

The wife said to me upon noticing my presence.

“Or, ufufu, would you like to secretly have some of our prized castella?”

“C-castella....!”

I really wanted to eat some. I truly would have liked to accept her offer. But right now—

“Thank you for the offer. But before that, there’s something I’d like to ask. Munch, munch.”

“Aren’t you already eating it? Well, what is it?”

“Do you have a map of this area?”

“A map? I believe there’s one in that cupboard.”

I took the map and spread it out immediately.

“What’s gotten into her?”

Tetsuta-san sounded a bit frightened as he watched me stare intently at the map. Did I really look so terrifying right now?

“Ma’am, I went ahead and used your washroom,”

It was then that Detective Kaburagi passed by, looking rather carefree. I quickly caught his attention.

“Kaburagi-san, I have a favor to ask!”

“Wh-what is it?”

He seemed to flinch from my menacing look, and straightened up on the spot.

“There’s somewhere I want you to go for me.”

“Where?”

“The culprit’s house! Munch, munch.”

Translation Notes:

And at ten, she’s finally a ‘great’ detective!: Lots of wordplay here, dealing with idioms that involve number. Such as 四面楚歌 (shimensoka / surrounded by foes on all sides), 五里霧中 (gorimuchuu / lose one’s bearings), 七転八倒 (shichiten battou / writhing in agony, going through much suffering), 九死一生 (kyuushi isshou) narrow escape from death).... I decided to translate them quite literally to preserve the counting pun. The last line, 「十でとうとう迷探偵！」 (tou de toutou meitantei / And at ten, she’s finally a ‘great’ detective!) has a few puns in it. 十 is ‘the number, ten,’ とうとう means ‘finally,’ both pronounced the same way. 迷探偵 (inept detective) is a pun on 名探偵 (great detective), which is also read as ‘meitantei.’ The kanji 迷 (mei) in 迷探偵 means ‘lost,’ as in a detective that’s always lost and unsure of what’s going on.

Song of Apples (リンゴの唄): A hit song in Japan after World War II, popular for depicting hope for the country after the war.

Anmitsu: A Japanese dessert made with jelly, red bean paste, sweet black syrup, and other toppings such as fruit.

Alain Delon, Ichikawa Raizo, Tsuruta Kouji: Popular actors in Japan in the 50s and 60s, who Sensei apparently bears a resemblance to. It's been mentioned before that he looks as handsome as someone straight out of a movie screen.